A LOST LETTER

By Ion Luca Caragiale

First performed in Romania in 1884 as *O Scrisoare Pierdută*

First performed in the UK on 28 February 2019 at the Romanian Cultural Institute in London.

Translation by Paul Stephenson and Laura Neacșu
Adapted by Paul Stephenson

Cast at the first English performance

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| Stefan TIPATESCU, Prefect of the Province. | Cristinel Hogaș |
| PRISTANDA, Police Commissioner. | Elena Vasilache |
| Marius ZAHARIA, Chairman of the Electoral Committee. | Rodrig Andrișan |
| ZOE Zaharia, his wife. | Ioana Goga |
| CHEDDARESCU, Lawyer, political ally of Zaharia. | Rareș Zimbran |
| PLATERESCU, ditto. | Magda Dimitrescu |
| THE CITIZEN, an inebriate voter. | Andreea David |
| Nicolae CATZAVENCO, Newspaper editor, politician. | Beatrice Ragea |
| POPESCU, Teacher, ally of Catzavenco. | Olivia Negrean |
| Alexander De Piffle IONESCU, Parliamentary candidate. | Olivia Negrean |
| Narrator | Maria Bălășoiu |
| Director | Leo Băcică |

ACT I

Scene 1

*A sitting room in the Prefect's official residence. The Prefect is reading a newspaper called 'The Carpathian Roar'.*

TIPATESCU 'We should all be ashamed! Our town cowers before a single man! Shame on us all! Our wicked stepmother of a government has delivered our lovely province into the clutches of a vampire!' A vampire – me, a vampire! It's ridiculous.

PRISTANDA Absolutely ridiculous! But, excuse me, Mr Tipatescu, what does he mean, a vamper?

TIPATESCU Someone who sucks the blood of the people. So now I'm sucking blood!

PRISTANDA You suck the blood of the people!?

TIPATESCU He's a rabble-rouser!

PRISTANDA A rabble-rouser, exactly!

TIPATESCU An ordure!

PRISTANDA An ordure, exactly!

TIPATESCU But he won't succeed!

PRISTANDA He will never succeed!

TIPATESCU Let him carry on scrabbling for votes. He imagines he can get elected thanks to his motley gang of teachers and priests, and his….. Walnut Producers' Association. Well, he's sadly mistaken! And if it turns out he's not mistaken – well, I'll eat my hat.

PRISTANDA I'll eat it too.

TIPATESCU Let's not talk about him any more. Leave him to howl at the moon, like the hound that he is.

PRISTANDA Absolutely, like a hound.

TIPATESCU You were just beginning to tell me about yesterday evening…….

PRISTANDA Ah yes, sir, yesterday evening, after dinner, I dozed off - just for a moment. That's how it has to be in my job – though in the police it's not so much a job as a real vacation. You know how it goes in the life of a poor Police Commissioner…. He never knows what time he will eat, or get a kip…. Unlike any other Christian soul.

TIPATESCU Naturally..

PRISTANDA It's a hard life. The family is large, but the renumeration - tiny. The posterity budget doesn't permit any more. It's hard, Mr Tipatescu, sir. The wife tells me 'Ask that Prefect of yours to give you a rise, or we'll starve!' 9 kids, Mr Prefect sir, heaven conserve you from that! 9 kids, not a single one more nor less! The State doesn't ask how we manage, it simply demands our duty. As if it was easy, with 9 kids. Large family, tiny renumeration, the posterior budget……

TIPATESCU The austerity budget prevents us from paying you any more, it's true. But you weren't born yesterday, you make it up how you can. If there's a hole in the roof you patch it up with material taken from somewhere else. We know that, don't we?

PRISTANDA Who would know that if not you, sir. As if your honour would not know!

TIPATESCU And I've no objection if you manage it discreetly; I like it when an official puts his heart into the service. Provided he's a man I can trust.

PRISTANDA A man of trust, yessir, at your orders!

TIPATESCU I'm not going to inquire too closely, especially when there's a large family, a few lei more or less, what does it matter…..

PRISTANDA 9 souls, Mr Tipatescu, 9 souls, and the renumeration….

TIPATESCU As stipulated in the budget.

PRISTANDA Limited, Mr Tipatescu, I kiss your hand, but limited.

TIPATESCU Still, Pristanda, those flags, the day before yesterday, you really pulled a fast one there!

PRISTANDA *Laughing without thinking.* I pulled a fast one, alright! *Realising his mistake.* To be honest….. what do you mean 'a fast one', Mr Tipatescu?

TIPATESCU The Committee paid for 44 flags.

PRISTANDA Yes…

TIPATESCU Well, were 44 put up?

PRISTANDA They were put up, sure they were put up. The wind may have blown off one or two, but as for putting them up, they were definitively put up.

TIPATESCU 44?

PRISTANDA 44 exactly, Mr Tipatescu.

TIPATESCU Laughing. There's no need to tell stories, Pristanda. The evening of the illuminations, I toured the town by car, with my dear friend Marius and Zoe. It was she who had the idea, just to amuse herself - 'Let's count Pristanda's flags', she said.

PRISTANDA Sorry, but that breaks my heart, Mr Tipatescu, really that breaks my heart. Madam Zoe, on whom I relied for protection….

TIPATESCU But she didn't say that in a bad way. She was only having fun. She knows, just as Uncle Marius knows, that you're our man.

PRISTANDA Your man, Mr Tipatescu, and Madam Zoe's and Mr Zaharia's..... So you counted, and it was right, wasn't it? 44.

TIPATESCU 14 , 15 maybe.

PRISTANDA Let's count them, Mr Tipatescu, let's count them. 2 at the Prefecture....

TIPATESCU 2

PRISTANDA ....2 on the Square....

TIPATESCU 4

PRISTANDA ...2 at the Town Hall....

TIPATESCU 6

PRISTANDA ....One at the boys' school....

TIPATESCU 7

PRISTANDA .....One at the girls' school.....

TIPATESCU 8

PRISTANDA ...One at the hospital.....

TIPATESCU 9

PRISTANDA .....2 at St Nicholas' Cathedral.....

TIPATESCU 11

PRISTANDA .....2 at the Prefecture – 14.....

TIPATESCU You already counted the ones at the Prefecture.

PRISTANDA No, your honour, no. *He counts more and more quickly.* 2 at the Town Hall - 18, 6 at the schools - 24, 2 up St Nicholas' Catheter - 30.....

TIPATESCU You already counted those, I tell you, and what's more your calculations are going astray.

PRISTANDA May Heaven preserve me from that, Mr Prefect - 44, 44 exactly. One or two may have been carried off by the wind or – well, who knows? – something or other... a stork, maybe....

TIPATESCU And what would a stork want with a flag?

PRISTANDA To line its nest, I suppose...

TIPATESCU With our national flag!

PRISTANDA Birds.... What can you do with them, sir? They've no respect, they're just a bundle of extincts.

TIPATESCU The lining of the nest is not the most ignoble of instincts. And it's known in other species too. Do you really think you can pull the wool over my eyes?

PRISTANDA Suddenly changing his tone. The family is large, the renumeration tiny, as stimulated...

TIPATESCU Let's not talk about these flags any more...

PRISTANDA Exactly, there's no need to talk about them.

TIPATESCU Tell me what you were going to say, I'm in a hurry.

PRISTANDA Yessir. So yesterday evening, about 10.30, I come home, I eat a little, I stretch out – well scarcely, just to doze for a minute. The wife says – pardon me but I'm repeating her words - 'Take off all that clobber and get yourself off to kip'. 'Who, me?' I reply. 'No, duty calls me, that's all I know – duty, night and day.' So about midnight I wake up, I take off the uniform, I put down

my kepi, I dress in cilivian clothes to go wherever duty calls. Outside, the town is quiet. One o'clock is just striking. I slink around the Town Hall into the demolition site and I see lights in the wide open windows at Catzavenco's place - you know, those big windows at the back. You can easily get up there by climbing the fence. Me, I'm always dismembering my duty and an idea suddenly comes into my head. Suppose we go and pinch something from the honourable citizen, I say to myself, that wouldn't be bad. I scale the fence like a cat. Up there I could hear and see everything. It was like being at the theatre.

TIPATESCU And then?

PRISTANDA They were playing cards.

TIPATESCU Who was there?

PRISTANDA Who would you expect? The penpushers: Popescu, Vasilescu, the priest Priptich.

TIPATESCU The priest too?

PRISTANDA Yes, the priest and loads of others, the whole gang. They had all been smoking, it was belching out of that window like it was a steamboat funnel. The only ones still playing were the priest and Popescu. The others were gabbing.

TIPATESCU And Catzavenco was lambasting me with insults?

PRISTANDA And what insults! For you and for the government, and he was remunerating his voters....

TIPATESCU .....teachers, priests, and wasters.

PRISTANDA Wasters, that's the word!

TIPATESCU I'll give them votes.

PRISTANDA Wait a bit, sir, that's not all. Suddenly Catzavenco says: 'I wager you that we will shortly secure the vote of a certain person on whom the vamper counts' – there too they call you, with all due respect, the vamper – 'on whom he counts even more than on the Lord above, and once we have this certain person, we will have all the rest. Just listen to this letter...' And he pulls a letter out of his pocket. But that devil-priest suddenly gets up from the card table. 'Wait, my dear friend' he says, 'wait, I would rather be entombed alive than not hear your letter. I'm just going to light a cigarette and I'll be with you'. So he gets up, lights a cigarette and throws the burning match out the window, right in my face. I fall off the fence right on top of some passing inbecile. The inbecile begins to holler and up there everyone rushes to the windows. I slip away along the fence.

TIPATESCU And then?

PRISTANDA I went back, but the windows were shut and the curtains drawn.

TIPATESCU I don't understand. What letter? Which 'person'? I'm off now - Zaharia and Zoe expect me for lunch. They never lunch without me and dear Zaharia never goes out before lunch. I must hurry, Zoe is so..... impatient.

PRISTANDA What are your orders for me, sir?

TIPATESCU Find out what letter that was and to whom it was addressed.

PRISTANDA Yessir.

TIPATESCU I'm not afraid of Catzavenco's dirty intrigues, but it would be good to catch him out, this..... honourable individual.

PRISTANDA Catch him out, exactly!

TIPATESCU Wait a minute, I'll get changed and we can go out together. I have a few words still to say to you....

PRISTANDA I'll wait, Mr Tipatescu.

Exit Tipatescu

PRISTANDA It's not a happy one, the lot of a Police Commissioner. While Mr Tipatescu has time to waste on counting my flags. The poor wife was right when she said: 'suck up to him and grab everything you can get off of him - the haves don't care about the have-nots'. That's how it goes – and Mr Tipatescu is a prime example. He doesn't lack for nothing. Quite the contrary. What doesn't he have? Property? He's got property alright. A situation? And what a situation! Madam Zoe? Madam

Zoe, for sure!  He's in easy street – with loads of money. And me, meanwhile? A large family, a tiny renumeration: as stimulated in the budget……

*Enter Zaharia, talking to himself, without seeing Pristanda*

ZAHARIA Our society is riddled with corruption. There's no longer any morals, any principles – nothing. Self-interest alone rules. He's right, my son. He may be young but he's mature and serious. What he wrote to me yesterday is so true: 'Papa, where there are no morals corruption reigns and if a society lacks principles then we may assert that it has none..!'  What infamy, what villainy…..  ah there you are, Pristanda.

PRISTANDA Here, Mr Zaharia, I kiss your hand, and at your orders.

ZAHARIA Has Tipatescu gone out?

PRISTANDA No, Mr Zaharia, he's just coming back in a minute, he's out there. Ah! There he is.

*Enter Tipatescu, surprised to see Zaharia.*

TIPATESCU Dear Marius, it's you. How is that possible? You've gone out before lunch! What's going on?

ZAHARIA It's a *commedia*, Stefan, I'll tell you. *He makes a sign to Tipatescu to send Pristanda on his way.*

PRISTANDA You have any further orders for me, Mr Tipatescu?

TIPATESCU No, but don't forget what I told you. This affair must be brought to light as soon as possible.

PRISTANDA Understood.

TIPATESCU Is it going to take long, dear Marius? Could you not tell me all about it over lunch?

ZAHARIA Have a little patience…  Zoe must know nothing about this. It's a *commedia*, Stefan.

TIPATESCU OK. Pristanda, drop by Mr Zaharia's and ask Madam Zoe to excuse us if we are late - that's right isn't it, my friend? We have political issues to resolve man to man.

PRISTANDA At your orders, sir.

*Exit Pristanda*.

Scene 2

TIPATESCU So, my friend, what's up? You look shocked.

ZAHARIA Have a little patience, I tell you. This morning, about half past eight – I hadn't even had time to drink my coffee – the valet comes into my bedroom, hands me a note and says that they're waiting for the reply. Try to guess who had sent me this note.

TIPATESCU Who?

ZAHARIA The honourable Mr Catzavenco!

TIPATESCU Catzavenco!

ZAHARIA I say to myself – what could he want with me and what could I have in common with him? The contrary would be more likely, if we take the point of view of principles.

TIPATESCU Naturally. And then?

ZAHARIA Wait, you'll see. *He takes a letter out of his pocket and passes it to Tipatescu.*

TIPATESCU *Reading the envelope.* 'To Mr Marius Zaharia, venerable Chairman of the Permanent Committee, of the School Committee, the Electoral Committee, the Agricultural Committee and of other committees and commissions'. What a load of twaddle! Reading the letter. 'Venerable Sir! In the interests of your honour as a citizen and as head of a family, we beg you to call today, between 9.30 and 10, at the seat of our organ '*The Carpathian Roar*,' which is also the HQ of the encyclopedic association 'The Romanian Economic Dawn,' where a document of the greatest importance to you will be communicated. From your devoted servant Nicolae Catzavenco..'' And then? What document?

ZAHARIA Have a little patience, and you'll see. I considered my options – should I go or should I stay? Let's go, I said to myself, finally, even if it's only out of curiosity to see what kind of trick he's playing. I got dressed right away and went...

TIPATESCU To Catzavenco's?

ZAHARIA Just hang on..... you'll see..... to Catzavenco's. As soon as I came in, he got up, all respectfully, and offered me an armchair. 'Venerable Chairman,' he said: 'I deeply regret that our relations have been frosty, I have always thought of you as the thinking head of our province'. Plus all sorts of other frills. I cut him short. 'Sir, I say, esteemed Sir, you made me come here in order to show me a document. Well then, show it to me.' He hesitates: 'I fear that the blow may be too severe for you, I wanted to prepare you in advance, you a man so venerable and so... so....' More frills. I interrupt him again. 'Sir, esteemed Sir, have a little patience – the document!' And he says 'It's just that.... I don't dare... you know, women...' So that's what he was coming to - the woman. Poor Zoe! Don't tell her, she mustn't know for anything in the world, she's so sensitive!

TIPATESCU What! The wretch! He dared! *Troubled, he makes to get up but Zaharia holds him back.*

ZAHARIA Hang on and you'll see. He continues: 'women don't always appreciate the merits and the moral qualities of a spouse or the respect that they owe him'. OK, let's cut it short, I say to him 'Sir, esteemed Sir, have a little patience – the document!' The rascal realizes that there's nothing else for it and he shows me a letter. From whom and for whom? Guess?

TIPATESCU From whom, dear Marius?

ZAHARIA Wait and see. A letter from you to my wife, to Zoe: a love letter in accordance with all the rules of the art. Huh? What do you say about that?

TIPATESCU It can't be, it's not possible.

ZAHARIA I must have read it ten times at least. I know it off by heart. Listen: 'My sweet Zoe, the venerable (that is to say, me) is going to the meeting this evening (that is the meeting of the day before yesterday). I (that is to say, you) must stay at home because I'm expecting telegrams from Bucharest to which I will need to reply immediately. It's even possible that the Minister will summon me to the telegraph. So don't wait for me but rather you (that is to say, my wife Zoe) come to your honey darling (that is to say, you) who adores you as always and kisses you thousands and thousands of times.' *He looks closely at Tipatescu, who is at the peak of his agitation.*

TIPATESCU *Getting up and pacing up and down.* It's incredible, I'll have his guts for garters, it's incredible.

ZAHARIA Of course it's incredible. But how can one imagine such villainy? I understand that sometimes a document can be forged, but this one – it's beyond me. I wish you could have seen, Stefan, what a masterly imitation it is, one could swear that it's your writing, truly swear! But look at you! Is it possible that you should get so upset? For such a scoundrel! Why get yourself in such a state? That's how the world goes, we're not about to change it. The depravity of mankind knows no limits, we can scarcely fathom how deep it can go....

TIPATESCU The wretch!

ZAHARIA Come on, man, come on, have a little patience. You just need to reply to him as I did: 'Bravo, esteemed Sir, you're playing Machiavelli, but I am not your man.' Well, when he realized that I wasn't taken in, you know how far he went? He said that if I didn't attach any importance to the matter, the public would do so in my place, because the letter would be published in the Sunday edition, with a nice border, to attract the readers.

TIPATESCU I'll have him shot, burnt on a slow fire. I must have him here, immediately, dead or alive, with the letter. Heading for the door. Pristanda! Pristanda! Here, Commissioner!

*Exit Tipatescu*

ZAHARIA Have a little..... He's too precipitate! He's not master of himself! Otherwise, he's fine – a good lad, intelligent and well-educated, but he's too quick, he gets carried away. He wasn't made to be a senior official. In a society without morals or principles, you need a tiny bit of diplomacy.

*Tipatescu returns*

TIPATESCU The blackguard! The scoundrel!

ZAHARIA Hey, come on, calm down and don't think any more about this foolishness. We have more serious business to discuss. There's the meeting this evening to choose our election candidate. Shall we propose Platerescu? Or Cheddarescu?

TIPATESCU Does it matter?

ZAHARIA You're right: they're equally reliable. I think it's Platerescu's turn. And he has a good grasp of history. But I've heard that Catzavenco and his acolytes want to provoke a scandal tonight.

TIPATESCU Don't you worry about that, this evening Mr Catzavenco will not be at the meeting: he will find himself elsewhere – in a secure location.

ZAHARIA Are you coming for lunch?

TIPATESCU No thank you, I have things to do. Go ahead yourself and give all my best to Madam Zoe.

ZAHARIA Alright, but as for dinner, that's promised. This evening I'm going to the meeting, and you'll have to stay with my Zoe, she gets anxious on her own.

TIPATESCU Yes, my dear Marius, of course.

ZAHARIA Goodbye, Stefan.

TIPATESCU Goodbye, my dear Marius.

ZAHARIA And don't let yourself be troubled by this chicanery. You see how the world goes. In a society without morals or principles, you mustn't be precipitate, what you need is – just a little bit of patience.

*Exit Zaharia.*

Scene 3

TIPATESCU *Staggering and falling into a chair with his head in his hands*. What is to be done? What shall I do? And why is Pristanda not here?

*Enter Zoe*

ZOE Stefan! Stefan!

TIPATESCU Zoe! You know what's happened?

ZOE I know….. I'm done for, Stefan. I know, I was right here in the bedroom, I came up the servants' staircase, I arrived just after Marius. I didn't have the nerve to face him, even though he doesn't believe a word of what they told him. I heard everything, everything! I'm done for, Stefan. When Pristanda left, I told him all about it, he's the only one who can still save us.

TIPATESCU How did you find out?

ZOE I found out immediately after Marius. See this letter.

TIPATESCU 'Dear Madam, our editorial office finds itself in possession of a document signed by our amiable Prefect and addressed to your esteemed self. We could assign this document to you, in exchange for which we should be grateful to secure your good offices in relation to the amiable Prefect. Please therefore have the goodness to drop by immediately at our office in order to settle this affair to the satisfaction of both parties'. How, how could you lose the letter, Zoe?

ZOE (*in tears)* I don't know. The evening before yesterday, when I left you, I had it. I don't know if I still had it when I got home. Perhaps I took out my hankie on the way and dropped the letter then.

TIPATESCU What a disaster!

ZOE I went to Catzavenco's, I'm just on my way back. He says he'll return the letter as long as we promise to back him in the election. If not, he'll publish it the day after tomorrow.

TIPATESCU It's a life and death struggle. He wants to destroy us, but we'll destroy him. But where's Pristanda?

ZOE I sent him to Catzavenco to buy back the letter, no matter what the price.

TIPATESCU So Pristanda's gone there?

ZOE Surely.

*They hear a noise of someone coming.*

TIPATESCU That must be him now. *He goes towards the left hand door, opens it to see who it is and comes back quickly*. Hide yourself! Quick!

*Both exit by the right hand door.*
*Enter Plateresсu and Cheddarescu..*

Scene 4

CHEDDARESCU Perhaps we should interpret the facts in another manner: it’s a manoeuvre, a crude ploy to intimidate a few undecided voters.

PLATERESCU But I saw the venerable Zaharia go in to Catzavenco’s, this morning at about 10, when I was going into town. At ten o’clock precisely, I go into town, whether or not I have any business.

CHEDDARESCU And so?

PLATERESCU I saw the respectable Madam Zaharia coming out of Catzavenco’s, this morning at about 11, as I was going home. At eleven o’clock precisely I go home, whether or not I have clients.

CHEDDARESCU I don't understand.

PLATERESCU What’s not to understand? At eleven o’clock precisely…….

CHEDDARESCU No, no, my dear chap, it’s all these dealings with the opposition that I don't understand. You saw Mr Zaharia go into Catzavenco’s first, and then Madam Zaharia. I’ve just seen Commissioner Pristanda go into Catzavenco’s.

PLATERESCU And don't you draw any conclusion?

CHEDDARESCU Are we being betrayed?

PLATERESCU I would go further and say: I’m happy to be betrayed if the interests of the party so demand, but on one condition – that they keep us informed.

CHEDDARESCU The Prefect must provide us with the key to this mystery. And here he is…

*Enter Tipatescu with a false air of relaxation.*

TIPATESCU Good morning, gentlemen, a very good morning to you.

CHEDDARESCU *(aside)* He looks white as a sheet.

PLATERESCU *(aside)* He looks red as a beetroot. *Aloud* Good afternoon, sir.

TIPATESCU But, I beg you, take a seat.

CHEDDARESCU Thank you, but we’re in a hurry. It's past noon.

PLATERESCU And at past noon exactly, I go to the courtroom, whether or not I have a hearing, I still go.

CHEDDARESCU This is what it’s about, in brief. They say in town….

PLATERESCU That is to say - allow me, let’s be clear, I like to dot the i’s and cross the t’s - we hear it said…..

CHEDDARESCU ….We hear it said that our party will support Catzavenco in the election.

TIPATESCU What party?

PLATERESCU Our party - Madam Zaharia, you, Mr Zaharia, we and all the rest of us, will be the architects of Catzavenco’s triumph.

TIPATESCU And who says so? *False laugh.*

CHEDDARESCU Don't laugh, sir, don't laugh, the whole town is talking about it.

PLATERESCU And they have reasons to fear…

CHEDDARESCU Mr Zaharia has made a visit to Mr Catzavenco.

TIPATESCU And so?

PLATERESCU Madam Zaharia has made a visit to Mr Catzavenco.

TIPATESCU And so?

CHEDDARESCU Commissioner Pristanda has made a visit to Mr Catzavenco.

PLATERESCU What does it mean?

CHEDDARESCU We must admit… we're worried about what the people say….

TIPATESCU And what do they say, the people?

PLATERESCU Do you want me to speak clearly to you, man to man? We fear betrayal, that's it.

TIPATESCU Tell me, my friend, don't you think that you're becoming more catholic than the Pope?

PLATERESCU When the principal principles are at stake, well, sir, I am - that is to say, no, I am not - but when principles so demand, I become more catholic than the Pope.

TIPATESCU *Angrily* Gentlemen, it's impossible for me to hear in my own home such remarks, which I consider as so many insults.

PLATERESCU Let's not get carried away, dear sir!

TIPATESCU How do you expect me not to get carried away? You come to my home, to me who has sacrificed my career to stay here and organize your party, because - you must recognize it – without me you would never have been able to get it together – you come to my home to throw this insult in my face, calling me a traitor! That is unacceptable!

CHEDDARESCU Excuse me… Here's what Mr Catzavenco is having distributed around the town. It's printed, sir! Takes out a leaflet.

TIPATESCU *Snatching the leaflet. Scornfully.* Printed!

PLATERESCU Printed, exactly… *Snatching the leaflet back.* Allow me.. 'From a reliable and better than well-informed source, we learn with absolute certainty that the candidature of our political friend, Mr Catzavenco, Chairman of the Independent Group, has no longer anything to fear from the administration. On the contrary, we have POWERFUL reasons to believe that not ONLY Mr Zaharia, the ancient and venerable Chairman of the Electoral Committee, but also our youthful and dynamic Prefect have at last reached the conclusion that, given the difficulties which afflict the country, our province could not be better represented than by a politically independent candidate such as our friend Mr Catzavenco. Mr Catzavenco will take the floor at the meeting this evening. Signed, The Independent Group.' Well?

TIPATESCU *Aside*. There's not a moment to lose. *Aloud*. Gentlemen, important business summons me to the telegraph. Excuse me, but….

*He rings a bell and exits.*

CHEDDARESCU That's all?

PLATERESCU As if he said, 'there's the door'. Great!

CHEDDARESCU Let's go to Zaharia's. There's nothing more to learn here, let's go..

PLATERESCU Cheddarescu, the spectre of betrayal horrifies me! What time is it?

CHEDDARESCU Just past noon.

PLATERESCU Just past noon! At just past noon precisely I…..

TIPATESCU Reappears. So, gentlemen, still here?

CHEDDARESCU We're going, we're going, Sir, we don't want to bother you.

PLATERESCU We're going, but remember that we're members of the same party. As I remarked just now to my friend Cheddarescu, I accept betrayal if the interests of the party so demand, but we should be kept informed, us too.. And that's why I've always repeated, along with our great forebears, with Michael the Bold and with Stephen the Great, I love betrayal - but I hate the betrayers. Goodbye, Sir, goodbye.

CHEDDARESCU Goodbye.

TIPATESCU Closing the door behind them, very angry. Oh!

Scene 5

*Enter Zoe.*

ZOE They've buzzed off? You see, Stefan? And Pristanda's nowhere to be found! You heard? A frightful disaster looms over us.

TIPATESCU Quiet! Someone's coming.. it's surely Pristanda.

*He goes towards the door. Enter The Citizen, drunk.*

THE CITIZEN Here, waiter!.....

ZOE Who on earth is this now?

TIPATESCU What do you want?

THE CITIZEN Me? Me, I'm a voter.

TIPATESCU What's your name?

THE CITIZEN What's my name? Who gives a - - ? I'm a voter, isn't that enough?

ZOE I think he's a bit squiffy.

TIPATESCU Let him go to hell. There's nobody out there, they're letting in all the madmen, all the drunks! Go on, get out!

THE CITIZEN I'm not drunk. Madam Zoe, you and I know each other. Mr Zaharia knows me too. That's not to say that we support Mr Catzavenco. He is one of ours, in the same producers' association.... But me, as a voter, a proprietor, who do I vote for? That's the reason I'm here.

ZOE Get him out, Stefan, he's really quite sloshed.

TIPATESCU Please go, citizen.

ZOE Be nice, dear citizen, and leave.

TIPATESCU You understand? Leave us now, and we'll talk another time.

THE CITIZEN Why another time? Why not now? I've got nothing else to do. Don't pay any attention to me. It's true that I'm a bit..... I made a terrible mistake. Let's see... it's the drink.... I'll remember...

TIPATESCU Be reasonable, my friend, please understand...

THE CITIZEN I found a letter.

TIPATESCU and ZOE A letter!

THE CITIZEN Yes. A letter from you – for Madam Zoe. I found it the day before yesterday, in the street. Just imagine – tavern crawling and partying since the day before yesterday until this morning... What a life!

TIPATESCU *Throws himself at him and takes him by the throat.* Wretch!

THE CITIZEN Don't shove me about, you'll make me dizzy.

ZOE Let him go, Stefan, listen to him.

THE CITIZEN Yes, let me go, Stefan, listen to me. When I found it, this letter, I opened it out of curiosity and I stood under a gas lamp to read it. Before I'd finished it, there was Mr Catzavenco behind me trying to snatch it off me.

TIPATESCU And he got it?

ZOE He got it?

THE CITIZEN You think so? I quickly stuffed it in my pocket. Mr Catzavenco says 'Bravo, you're a member of our Producers' Association and yet you receive letters from the Prefect? Bravo, citizen'. 'From the Prefect, you think?' I says. 'I recognized his writing', he says. 'Show it to me'. 'God forbid' I says. 'Give it to me'. 'I won't give it to you' – 'but yes' – 'but no'. Well, if you have to discuss something, you may as well do it over a drink. We started with a brandy, a glass, two glasses, three,

we dealt with them swiftly, then we moved on to beer, after that wine, and it continued like that - re-wine, re-beer. It was all on Mr Catzavenco's tab. He paid for it heavily, alright. I drank his money.

ZOE But the letter?

TIPATESCU The letter! Where is the letter?

THE CITIZEN Don't shout. Everything's spinning. I've got it on me, that letter! Yes! I've brought it to you. *Searching his pockets.*

ZOE and TIPATESCU Is that possible?

THE CITIZEN Yes, I've got it on me. Mr Catzavenco wanted to give me 50 lei for it. No, I replied, money, I don't lack for that, thank the Lord, I'm a proprietor – and qualified to vote. That's true, but I... Who do I vote for? I've lost it! I've lost it!

TIPATESCU Ah!

ZOE Mr Catzavenco stole it from you.

THE CITIZEN That's possible, I was asleep on my feet. Try to imagine, put yourself in my shoes - a round of beer, a round of wine, then re-beered.....

TIPATESCU *Taking him by the shoulders and shaking him.* Wretch! What have you done?

THE CITIZEN Don't shove me!

TIPATESCU Pristanda!

*Enter Pristanda, breathless.*

Get that trouble-maker out of here and..

ZOE Take him out down the servants' staircase.

PRISTANDA Let's go, citizen.

THE CITIZEN Don't push! You'll make me dizzy.

PRISTANDA Get along.

THE CITIZEN But who do I vote for?

PRISTANDA Go on.

THE CITIZEN Don't push me. The whole world is... spinning..

*Exit The Citizen pushed by Pristanda, who shuts the door behind him.*

ZOE So, Pristanda, you've been at Catzavenco's?

PRISTANDA Exactly. He's not going quietly – he wants either 10,000 lei or to become our MP!

TIPATESCU We'll have to lock him up. On you go, Pristanda. Take some men with you and bring him to me, dead or alive, at the station, right away.

ZOE Stefan!

TIPATESCU Go on!

PRISTANDA At your service, sir.

ZOE You're playing with fire.

TIPATESCU Zaharia doesn't suspect anything. He trusts you.

ZOE He may change his mind once the letter is published. Or, who knows, he might accidentally barge in one day and find us in some sort of position that might be considered..... compromising.

TIPATESCU That's why I'm laying hold of Catzavenco, to stop the publication.

ZOE But that may make him more furious, and more determined. And you say Zaharia trusts me – but that upsets me almost more than anything else. *She's in tears, Tipatescu takes her in his arms.*

*Enter Zaharia.*

TIPATESCU Ah, there you are! I'm afraid your wife is very upset.

ZOE *Groaning and seeming to faint into Zaharia's arms.* My dear, my husband.

ZAHARIA My little Zoe… She's heard?

TIPATESCU She knows everything.

ZAHARIA *Administering first aid, having stretched her out on the sofa with Tipatescu's help. Raising her legs to aid circulation, etc.* Didn't I ask you not to tell her anything? She's so sensitive. You see! A glass of water, quick. Don't worry, my sweet. Everything will be alright.

ZOE But I don't see what we can do – when the writing is so well imitated. Apparently - well… that's what Stefan said you said.

ZAHARIA I only saw it once, and it looked to be a masterly forgery. Perhaps if we could get an expert to look at it…

ZOE Oh no, no!

TIPATESCU She's right. Catzavenco will never hand it over for the Commissioner to oversee a proper forensic examination. And we could never rely on the impartiality of any test he organized.

ZAHARIA You mean that Catzavenco organized?

TIPATESCU Naturally. We could trust the Commissioner, of course.

ZAHARIA Of course.

ZOE Wouldn't it be safer, and easier, simply to support him in the election? He's not the worst.

TIPATESCU Never! Catzavenco is nothing but a scoundrel.

ZAHARIA He's a career scoundrel, so this won't be the only nasty little trick he's playing. We just have to catch him out: what we need is ……. just a tiny bit of patience.

ACT II

Scene 1

*The same room. Zaharia, Platerescu and Cheddarescu are sitting round a table, studying the electoral roll, with coloured pencils in their hands.*

CHEDDARESCU 69 marked in red, they're ours. 11 marked in blue, they're theirs.

PLATERESCU 12…

ZAHARIA Have a little patience… 1,2,5,7,10,11.

PLATERESCU 12.

ZAHARIA Counting Enake Siripeano.

CHEDDARESCU He forfeited the right to vote when he married off his daughter. He gave her his property as a dowry, didn't he? If he votes now, that honourable gentleman is good for a spell in prison.

ZAHARIA Have a little patience… What if we can persuade him to vote for us?

PLATERESCU That's another matter. If he votes with us, it's easy: his case comes before the committee next week – but how will he vote with us?

CHEDDARESCU Yes, how will he vote with us?

ZAHARIA By voting the same way as us.

CHEDDARESCU Don't you understand what we're saying? We, that is to say, our party - who are we voting for? who are we working for? we still don't know!

ZAHARIA Have a little..

PLATERESCU We don't know!

ZAHARIA I beg you, a tiny little bit of...

PLATERESCU I will go further still and affirm what I said to my friend Cheddarescu here: I fear betrayal.

ZAHARIA What do you mean, betrayal?

CHEDDARESCU That's why today, when we smelt.....

PLATERESCU ...a rat..

CHEDDARESCU ...somewhere...

PLATERESCU ....in the centre...

CHEDDARESCU ...in the centre....

ZAHARIA Smelt a rat somewhere in the centre?

PLATERESCU If that's so, if it's betrayal and the interests of the party demand it, then so be it.

CHEDDARESCU But we need to know...

*Zaharia tries to interrupt without success.*

PLATERESCU .....because I have always said, along with our great forefathers, with Mircea the Old, and with Vlad the Impaler: I love betrayal but....

ZAHARIA Have just a little...

CHEDDARESCU What good is patience now, dear Chairman? There's no more time for patience. We have the meeting this evening, don't we?

PLATERESCU And tomorrow, it's the election, right?

ZAHARIA Yes..

PLATERESCU Well, who are voting for?

CHEDDARESCU Yes, who are voting for?

ZAHARIA Have a little patience. Who have you voted for up to now?

CHEDDARESCU I don't understand.

PLATERESCU Me neither.

ZAHARIA Alright. Let's make it clear.

PLATERESCU That's all we ask, to have everything clarified.

ZAHARIA Who are you? *They look baffled.* I repeat, who are you? Homeless beggars, sleeping in doorways? Foreigners stealing jobs from hard-working Romanians? Demonstrators, trouble-makers? Revolutionaries? *Platerescu and Cheddarescu indicate that they are none of these, with increasing vigour.* You, that is to say, we are citizens, gentlemen, honourable citizens. We three in particular are pillars of the community: proprietors, members of the Permanent Committee, the Electoral Committee, the Committee for the Erection of Trajan's Statue and... so on. We vote for the candidate nominated by the party, because it is on the party that the prosperity of our country depends. And our own prosperity, gentlemen, on what does that depend, if not on the prosperity of the country as a whole...

CHEDDARESCU That's true.

PLATERESCU That's true, but....

ZAHARIA But what? The name of the candidate could be mine, yours, or his, according to the interests of the party. Any moment now we will be informed of it. The Prefect is coming: aren't we awaiting his return from the telegraph? And what is the telegraph doing meantime? Isn't it working? It's working, surely, if it's got nothing better to do. Perhaps even at this moment, while we're speaking, the name is humming along the wire, gentlemen, humming along the wire. What do you think, you two?

PLATERESCU It's very pleasant, Mr Zaharia, to hear you speak, very pleasant. But we fear betrayal.

CHEDDARESCU Not by you.

PLATERESCU Oh no, not by you.

ZAHARIA But by whom?

PLATERESCU By whom, by whom….. you well know by whom.

ZAHARIA On my little Zoe's head, I don't know.

CHEDDARESCU You're taking me for a fool.

PLATERESCU Let's put our cards on the table.

ZAHARIA Go on then.

PLATERESCU I told you, I'll repeat it: we fear betrayal. That's clear!

CHEDDARESCU Is that clear?

ZAHARIA That's clear. But by whom?

PLATERESCU By a friend….

ZAHARIA What friend?

CHEDDARESCU What friend? What friend? You know well….

ZAHARIA On my sweet Zoe's head, I know nothing..

PLATERESCU You're taking me for a fool again.

ZAHARIA But no..

PLATERESCU Our friend Tipatescu.

ZAHARIA What?

CHEDDARESCU The Prefect.

ZAHARIA How?

PLATERESCU We are worried that he's been……

CHEDDARESCU That he might possibly have been….

ZAHARIA What?

PLATERESCU …..fixing up something with Catzavenco.

ZAHARIA With Catzavenco?

PLATERESCU With the encyclopedist!

CHEDDARESCU With the nihilist!

ZAHARIA With Catzavenco! Tipatescu with Catzavenco, Tipatescu a traitor! Bravo! That's brilliant! I never expected that! Now I've heard it all! That's just perfect!

PLATERESCU We thought that…

CHEDDARESCU We told ourselves that…

ZAHARIA Have a little patience, gentlemen! I won't permit anyone, no-one at all, do you hear, to have the slightest suspicion of Tipatescu. See now, gentlemen, if anyone were to suspect my wife Zoe……

CHEDDARESCU I never touched Madam Zoe.

PLATERESCU Be assured, we would never….

ZAHARIA A little patience! I'm saying that, as far as I'm concerned, if anyone suspects my little Zoe or my friend Tipatescu it's the same thing. I did not meet this man yesterday: he's been living alongside me for 8 years. We became friends a few months after my second marriage. For 8 years we have lived like brothers and never, do you hear me, never have I discovered the least trifle with which to reproach him. Do you think he would have stayed on here as Prefect, instead of moving to Bucharest to become Director, if I hadn't insisted, and if my little Zoe hadn't also insisted? More than me, to be fair: my Zoe insisted more than I did.

PLATERESCU That's normal, women are more….. ambitious.

ZAHARIA Have a little patience! It was nothing to do with ambition, it was because he was our friend that we insisted. And the interest of the party demanded it. How could we have ever found a Prefect of his ability?

PLATERESCU One could be found, perhaps. Giving himself airs.

ZAHARIA Permit me to doubt that. A man of total independence who has rendered services to the party, to the province, to the country and to me, as a friend. And this man, you dare, you, members of the same party, you dare to suspect him and to speak of him in terms which are scarcely parliamentary! I regret that, gentlemen.

CHEDDARESCU But we…

ZAHARIA Have a little patience….. I regret that! As soon as you no longer understand high politics, it's betrayal that springs to your minds. What a mess! What a society! He's right, my son: if a society is without principles you might as well say that it has none. Betrayal by Tipatescu! Bravo! I've heard it all now. Goodbye, gentlemen, goodbye.

*Exit Zaharia.*

Scene 2

PLATERESCU So, did he satisfy you, our venerable Chairman?

CHEDDARESCU He plays it strong, very strong. He's tough, the Venerable. Can't get anything out of him. The secret remains intact. We'll have to wait.

PLATERESCU Wait? Wait for what? And until when? Already I seem to see him, at the end of the meeting tonight, standing up, ringing his little bell, and announcing: 'Gentlemen, have a little patience: our Committee's candidate is the honourable Mr Nicolae Catzavenco.'

CHEDDARESCU The Encyclopedist!

PLATERESCU The Nihilist! And Bravo here, Bravo there, and the whole town begins to shout Bravo! As for Commissioner Pristanda, he'll have a busy couple of days racing about, with his tongue hanging out, to ensure the election of Catzavenco, who has spent his time insulting us and dragging our names in the mud. And are we to stand by with our arms folded? Never!

CHEDDARESCU But what can we do? Take on the authorities?

PLATERESCU What can we do? Telegraph to Bucharest, to the Central Committee, to the Minister, to the newspaper, a succinct and lapidary telegram: 'Betrayal! The Prefect and his men are betraying the party for the benefit of the nihilist Catzavenco who they want to elect to Parliament. Treason! Treason!' Treason three times.

CHEDDARESCU That's really strong: …….too strong. I won't sign.

PLATERESCU Be courageous! Like me. There's no need to sign. We'll send it anonymously.

CHEDDARESCU Well alright then, I'll sign.

PLATERESCU We'll sign it 'several members of the party'.

CHEDDARESCU But suppose they recognize our handwriting at the telegraph office?

PLATERESCU We'll get someone else to write it out.

CHEDDARESCU Who?

PLATERESCU We'll surely find someone to do it. Let's go, Cheddarescu!

CHEDDARESCU As long as nothing happens to us.

PLATERESCU Be brave: anonymous. What's the time?

CHEDDARESCU 5 o'clock.

PLATERESCU Let's do it quickly, the telegraph closes between 5 and 6 exactly.

*Exit Platerescu and Cheddarescu*

Scene 3

*Enter Pristanda*

PRISTANDA Mission accontemplated! But what good will it do? I've laid hold of Mr Catzavenco. When I ordered the boys to jump him he yelled: 'I protest in the name of the Constitution! It's a violation of domesticity!' 'Violation, absolutely', I said, 'but grab him just the same'. Now he's cooling his heels. Once I had the joker banged to rights, I gave his domesticity a thorough violation, top to bottom: I prised up the parquet, I unbolted the stovepipes, I ripped up his library – no letter. I came back to the station, turned out his pockets, gave him an imitate body search *(some distaste at the recollection)* – nothing, still nothing. I threatened him: Mr Tipatescu has ordered me, I told him, to beat you like a horse thief: but he still wouldn't crapisstulate. It seems he won't talk to anyone but Madam Zoe. So, I run off to find her. But she's not at home. Ah! There she is now! Madam Zoe!

*Enter Zoe*

ZOE I'm so glad I found you, Pristanda.

PRISTANDA I was looking for you too, Madam Zoe.

ZOE What have I heard? What have you done? Have you all lost your marbles? Just now, coming out of my house, the doctor told me that the police have broken into Catzavenco's, that you arrested him and frogmarched him off to the police station. How could you have done that?

PRISTANDA Verbal instruction from Mr Tipatescu.

ZOE Where is he?

PRISTANDA I don't know, I'm looking for him too.

ZOE Why have you arrested Catzavenco?

PRISTANDA To get our hands on the letter.

ZOE And you have it?

PRISTANDA No, Madam Zoe. I searched his home and I searched him – nothing. The letter must have been congealed somewhere else.

ZOE You have ruined me. Tomorrow the letter will be published and your outrage will have been useless. The paper will still appear even if he's not around, those teacher chaps will see to that. And what will the Government in Bucharest say when they hear that you've violated Catzavenco's domicile on the eve of the election. How will Tipatescu retain his post as Prefect?

PRISTANDA There might still be a way to get the letter from him. That's what I came here to tell you. Catzavenco wouldn't listen to me – it is fruitile to demonstrate, he said. And that he wouldn't speak to anybody, nobody at all, except... you.

ZOE Me? Go, Pristanda, quickly. Release him and beg him on my behalf to come here. I'll wait for him.

PRISTANDA But if the Prefect....

ZOE If you care about yourself and your family....

PRISTANDA How would I not care about them, 11 souls!

ZOE Go quickly, hurry, and don't come back without Catzavenco. Treat him nicely... Take a cab and try not to dawdle.

PRISTANDA At your service!

ZOE Are you still here?

PRISTANDA I'm off!

*Exit Pristanda*

ZOE *Takes out a paper and reads:* 'In tomorrow's edition we will reproduce a sentimental letter of public interest written by a leading personality who honours our town with his presence, and addressed to a lady who exercises a remarkable degree of influence. The original will be placed in our offices, from tomorrow, at the disposal of any curious person who wishes to take cognizance thereof. That's all for today. Wishing our esteemed readers the very best of health.' What is to be done? *She walks up and down, agitated. Then finds the solution*. We have to get him elected. Of course, there's no point in hesitating. Once an unscrupulous bastard like Catzavenco gets his paws on a trump card like that, it's madness to resist. Stefan has to accept that, he has to. And why wouldn't Catzavenco make just as good a Member of Parliament as anyone else? But where is Stefan? Where on earth can he be?

Scene 4

*Enter Tipatescu*

TIPATESCU Zoe! There you are!

ZOE Stefan! What have you done? You've arrested Catzavenco! Didn't you stop to think before acting? Why on earth did you do that?

TIPATESCU Why? You ask me why? To prevent the disaster that your carelessness has set in motion. How could anyone be so distracted? A love letter, to stuff it nonchalantly in your pocket along with a handkerchief, and lose it like any old bit of paper, like a tram ticket... For God's sake! You're no longer a child, as far as I know – you're an intelligent woman. Even on the stage, such negligence would seem far-fetched.

ZOE You can judge me, judge me. You don't care. It's true, I've been a child... my foolishness is unheard of. But now we have to put things right. If you love me, Stefan, if you have ever loved me for a single instant, save me, save me from this frightful dishonour. You're a man, nothing can touch you. If our affair is exposed to the world, you won't die of it.... whereas I.... think of me, Stefan.

TIPATESCU It's precisely because I'm thinking of you that I've locked up Catzavenco.

ZOE In vain, in vain. Catzavenco could die today, and his paper would still publish the letter tomorrow. My God! I can see them, all our respectable fellow-citizens, grabbing the paper, ripping me apart, laughing. For weeks, months, years even, this affair will be the subject of all conversations. In this town where men and women have no other amusement but slander, even when there's no motive, you can imagine what a treat this will be - because this time they will have a motive, and what a motive! I seem already to hear all the gossip, all the outrage that will be aroused by this scandal. And me, during all that time, what will I do? Die! Yes, I'll die if that's what you want, because how could I live on afterwards?

TIPATESCU If there's no other way out.... Zoe, Zoe, do you love me?

ZOE I love you, but save me!

TIPATESCU Let's run away together.

ZOE You're mad! And Zaharia? And your position? And the scandal which would only grow and follow us?

TIPATESCU There's nothing to be done, then?

ZOE Yes!

TIPATESCU What?

ZOE Support the candidature of Catzavenco.

TIPATESCU Impossible.

ZOE Get him elected.

TIPATESCU Never!

ZOE There's no choice!

TIPATESCU Sooner death! Just think what you're saying. You see this telegram? I seized it and I ordered that no telegrams should be sent without my prior approval. Listen: 'Betrayal! The Prefect and his men are betraying the party for the benefit of the nihilist Catzavenco who they want to elect to Parliament. Treason! Treason! Treason three times'. Signed by 'several Members of the party'. No, whatever happens we can't support such a scoundrel, no, no, no. We'll find another way.

ZOE I don't see another way. There is no other way.

TIPATESCU So..?

ZOE So... Leave me to my disgrace, let me die of shame. Kill me… kill the one who has loved you, who has sacrificed everything for you. All your vows were worthless, then? You took my hand to lead me to my death - because I will kill myself before the scandal breaks out, today, right now, in front of you. You have led me towards death and you could save me, yet you let me die.

TIPATESCU Zoe, Zoe!

ZOE Leave me alone. If your own ambition and your trivial political intrigues are more important to you than my honour, more than my life, then leave me. I will die, with the certainty that throughout these 8 years of love, each moment has been a lie, each instant an illusion, that you have never loved me, never, never!

TIPATESCU Wait, Zoe, let's reflect….

ZOE We have no time to reflect. Each passing moment lights my way to death. You need to decide.

TIPATESCU Struggles with himself. To decide… decide..

ZOE Just now, on Windsor Road, I heard people talking about Catzavenco's arrest. I ran like a mad creature to his office. Here's the leaflet their Committee has published. You see what we're in for now he's been arrested. She shows him the leaflet and he reads it.

TIPATESCU That man is putting his life in the balance.

ZOE No, not his, he's risking my life. There are only two possibilities: either you love me, and I live – in which case there can be no battle with Catzavenco; or you don't love me and you let me die - and then it won't matter what happens. I have decided, yes ….. I don't want to die before I've tried what I can do – and I'm going to fight. I'm going to fight against you, too, with all my strength, against you, you ungrateful heartless man. I have to fight you, because now you're the biggest obstacle, you're the block in the road that would lead me back to peace. Yes, I've decided. I shall overcome…… and it's you I shall overcome. I'm so decided that I've just ordered Pristanda to release Catzavenco and to invite him here on my behalf.

TIPATESCU You're crazy! What have you done?

ZOE What I thought I had to do. If you don't want to support him, if you won't get him elected to save me, then it's me who will support him and get him elected, to save myself.

TIPATESCU How?

ZOE If I am for him, my husband with all the votes that he can call on will be for him. And anyone who is against him will be against me. So, Stefan, fight against me, crush me, you who pretend to love me! We will see….

TIPATESCU Zoe!

ZOE Let me go.

*Exit Zoe*

TIPATESCU Zoe! Zoe!

*Exit Tipatescu*

Scene 5

*Enter Pristanda, making bows before Catzavenco, who is following him.*

PRISTANDA Come in, Mr Catzavenco, sir, do please come in, and make yourself at home. And forgive me, Mr Catzavenco. Bear in mind my quasi-judicious role which demands that I carry out my duties with the utmost hypocrisy. You know, better than I do myself, how it is in the vacation of a

police commissioner. Even if it was my father that I had to arrest, then I would arrest him, that's my duty, you can't denigrate from that. That's why I beg you to forgive me.

CATZAVENCO Don't feel obliged to insist, Pristanda. You imagine that I don't understand the role of the police? In a constitutional democracy a police commissioner represents nothing more nor less than a tool.

PRISTANDA Absolutely, I'm just a tool.

CATZAVENCO The fault lies not in the arm that strikes, but in the will that commands. I've even written an article on the subject. I don't know whether you've read it….

PRISTANDA Certainly I've read it, Mr Catzavenco, certainly. The ejanvelists and your newspaper, they're par for the course for me. Let's not think about my job: my job is one thing, what I have in my heart is another. But what can I do? The family is large, the salary small, we're only just about managing.

CATZAVENCO And, in the end, how could there be martyrs if there were no executioners?

PRISTANDA Ah, that's so true, Mr Catzavenco.

CATZAVENCO Don't forget, citizen, on what conditions I came here. I'm in the Prefect's house, but I've no wish to see him. I would not compromise myself for so little. I've responded to Madam Zoe's appeal, it's she alone that I wish to see.

PRISTANDA Of course, Mr Catzavenco, it's Madam Zoe who you'll see. Anyway, the Prefect is not even here. Please, take a seat. Now you're here I'm going to deform Madam Zoe.

CATZAVENCO You can add that I'm in a hurry to return to the dungeon into which her disgrace has cast me.

PRISTANDA Understood. *Aside*: What a crafty fellow! He'd make a good prefect.

*Exit Pristanda, glancing admiringly at him.*

CATZAVENCO So at last they capitulate. The opposite would have astonished me. I seem already to hear the dear – the very dear and venerable Chairman proclaiming my name this evening: our candidate for Parliament! Poor Plateresc u! The immortal Gambetta put it very well: the end justifies the means. Dear Tipatescu! He must be mortally wounded. So much the better for me. He's losing his head, so much the worse for him. Madam Zoe, more reasonable than any of them, calls me and here I am, ready to kiss respectfully her pretty little hand. What else would I do? You must kiss the hand that gives you your nomination. But where can she be? She's not coming….
*He looks through the doors. Suddenly Tipatescu enters.*
Tipatescu! I would have preferred her.

TIPATESCU (*Aside*): God give me patience!

CATZAVENCO You may, sir, find my presence here unexpected. I beg your pardon. I must tell you that I have been escorted here directly from prison by your Commissioner who was himself obeying orders… and that I did not expect to find you here….

TIPATESCU (*Aside*): What insolence!

CATZAVENCO He informed me that I had been summoned by… well… otherwise I would not have come. In brief, if I am here as a prisoner, I'll stay. If not, and I am free – and I would have no problem with that – I'll leave right away.

TIPATESCU (*Who has been tapping his foot while listening. Speaks through gritted teeth)*. My dear Mr Catzavenco, I don't understand how two men as serious as you and I, in a situation which is perfectly clear, can waste their time in such quibbles and polite formulae. As for me, I prefer to put my cards on the table. But sit down, sit down. *Drawing up a chair. Aside:* What a nerve he has. But I need to keep my cool. It's lucky that Zoe's not here.

CATZAVENCO Sir, you like to put your cards on the table – I accept that. As for me I like to be brief, very brief. *Makes a gesture imitating a guillotine.* We can resolve this situation immediately. *Tipatescu offers him a chair.* No thanks.

TIPATESCU But sit down, sit down at least!

CATZAVENCO No thanks.

TIPATESCU Sit down I tell you!

CATZAVENCO *Who has drawn back, giving up and dropping into the chair*. Thank you.

TIPATESCU Right. *He sits down beside him. Catzavenco withdraws a little, Tipatescu advances, and so on.* So, my dear Sir and honourable fellow-citizen, you have entered into the possession – let us draw a discreet veil over the means you employed – entered into possession of a letter signed by me which might compromise the honour of a hard-working Romanian family.

CATZAVENCO Oh!

TIPATESCU Have I offended you? I beg your pardon. Let's cut it even shorter. You're a practical man, you have something which I absolutely must have. Please, my dear Sir and honourable fellow-citizen, what do you want in exchange?

CATZAVENCO What? You don't know?

TIPATESCU No.

CATZAVENCO You haven't the slightest idea?

TIPATESCU No. Otherwise why would I ask?

CATZAVENCO With dignity. Sir, a politician….

TIPATESCU *Scornfully*. That's to say, you…

CATZAVENCO Will you allow me to continue? A politician must, especially in the political circumstances such as those which prevail in our motherland, circumstances of a kind that could provoke civil unrest which, if we consider the history of constitutional states, especially a young one like ours….

TIPATESCU *Impatient, tapping his foot.* Sir, I beg you. I repeat: what do you want in exchange for this letter? Let's be brief, very brief. *Imitating, but with violence, the guillotine gesture Catzavenco made earlier.*

CATZAVENCO Right. If that's how it works, if I must be brief, here's what I ask you: don't fight against me, in fact go further – support my candidature.

TIPATESCU Your candidature! Sir, don't you have the impression that you are asking too much?

CATZAVENCO That's for you to say, you proposed this exchange. Reply yourself to your own question.

TIPATESCU *Getting closer and closer.* Really, tell me, and in all good faith, don't you have the impression that you are asking too much?

CATZAVENCO No.

TIPATESCU And if the Permanent Committee re-ordered itself so that a place was reserved in future for the very dear Mr Catzavenco?

CATZAVENCO That's nothing at all, Sir.

TIPATESCU If the office of State Advocate were to be assigned to a new holder: the same Mr Catzavenco?

CATZAVENCO That's not much, Sir.

TIPATESCU If the office of mayor, which has just become vacant, were to be assigned to this same Mr Catzavenco? If he was also to be made Curator of St Nicholas? What do you say? *Catzavenco smiles and makes a gesture of refusal.* And if the estate, not far from town, known as 'Chenies Manor'…..

CATZAVENCO If you will permit me, Sir, a politician must, indeed he is obliged, especially in the political circumstances such as those which prevail in our motherland….

TIPATESCU Words of straw. Keep your speeches for the rabble. I'm not a man who gets drunk on cold water. Let's get it straight, man to man! What are you asking for? *Stands up, ready to explode.*

CATZAVENCO *Standing up too.* What am I asking for? What am I asking for? You know very well what I ask. I ask what is due to me after all this time, after my long struggle to obtain it in this town of imbeciles in which I am the first…… among the political leaders… I demand…

TIPATESCU What do you demand?

CATZAVENCO I demand election as a Member of Parliament, that's what I demand, nothing more, nothing else, nothing, nothing. It's my right! I implore you! Don't fight against me, support me, get me elected. The day after tomorrow, the moment I am proclaimed by the necessary majority, at that moment you will have the letter – on my honour!

TIPATESCU On your honour! And if I can't get you elected?

CATZAVENCO You can.

TIPATESCU And if I don't want to? Tell me, suppose I don't want to see you elected?

CATZAVENCO You have to want it.

TIPATESCU You're forgetting that it's not wise to play such games with a man like me. No! No! I don't want to get you elected.

CATZAVENCO It must be.

TIPATESCU No.

CATZAVENCO It must be if you care even a little for the honour of…

TIPATESCU Wretch! Miserable rascal! I don't know what prevents me from smashing your skull in. Bastard! Give me the letter, tell me where to find the letter, or I'll kill you like a dog. *Takes a stick which is fixed to the wall and throws himself at Catzavenco who knocks things over as he runs around the sofa to escape, throws open the window and shouts.*

CATZAVENCO Help! Help! The vampire is killing me! Our Prefect is an assassin! Help!

*Zoe rushes in and places herself between the two.*

ZOE Mr Catzavenco, for the love of God! I beg you, don't shout! Stefan, you've gone mad. Mr Catzavenco, please….

CATZAVENCO How could I not shout, Madam?

TIPATESCU *Falling into a chair.* Bastard! Bastard! Bastard!

ZOE Mr Catzavenco, I ask you to forgive this momentary impulse of ill humour from Mr Tipatescu.

CATZAVENCO There is no forgiveness that can be granted, Madam. I must get out immediately: I cannot remain a moment longer in a house where my life is in danger.

ZOE Mr Catzavenco, you're a reasonable man, aren't you? A practical man; what counts for you is not the identity of the person who offers what you so deeply desire, but only that the offer is made.

CATZAVENCO I don't understand.

ZOE In exchange for this letter, you have asked for election as our MP. You have sworn on your honour that the day after you are elected, you will give the letter to the person who obtained the seat for you. Well! It's I who will ensure your election, I - and my husband - and you will give the letter to me. Do you accept?

CATZAVENCO I accept.

ZOE *Aside to Tipatescu.* And you understand that when I have the letter, having fought against you, everything – absolutely everything – will be over between us. *Aloud*. We are entirely agreed, aren't we, Mr Catzavenco?

CATZAVENCO Yes, Madam, entirely, but…..*He points at Tipatescu*

ZOE Make up your mind, Stefan. Would you be the enemy of my peace of mind? Tell me. Stefan!

TIPATESCU Well, as you want it, so be it. Come what may. Mr Catzavenco, you're Zoe's candidate, you're the candidate of dear Zaharia, consequently you're my candidate. The day after tomorrow you will be elected.

ZOE Ah!

CATZAVENCO The day after tomorrow I'll give it to you. *A noise is heard outside and the voice of Zaharia saying 'have a little patience'.*

ZOE Heavens, my husband!

TIPATESCU Zaharia!

CATZAVENCO The venerable!

TIPATESCU Quick, hide yourselves, both of you, he mustn't see you.

*Exit all three.*

Scene 6

ZAHARIA Nobody at home? And that imbecile of a valet told me Stefan and Zoe were here. Looks around and knocks on doors. Nobody! Ah, I nearly forgot. *Takes a pen and paper and writes:* 'Dear Stefan, I've been looking for you. I will return in half an hour. We must have a word before the meeting. Wait for me without fail, don't go out,.... have a little patience. Marius.' And now, no rest until I've uncovered all the intrigues of this dear Mr Catzavenco.

*Exit Zaharia.*

*Enter Zoe, Tipatescu and Catzavenco*

TIPATESCU To hell with politics, not a moment to yourself! *Closes the door.* There, now we're safe. I'm going to the telegraph to inform Bucharest of your candidature. Go home, I'll get word to you. At the meeting this evening be tactful, very tactful... *Knocks heard at the door.* It must be Pristanda. *He opens the door to find The Citizen.* You again.

CATZAVENCO *Tries to hide behind Zoe. Aside:* It's my chap.

THE CITIZEN Yes it's me again. I came about the same story as this morning. What do we do? It's tomorrow. Who do I vote for?

TIPATESCU Who for? Who for? Leave me alone, you're unbearable. Vote for whichever candidate you like!

THE CITIZEN I don't like any of them.

TIPATESCU Then leave me alone. The administration has no right to exert its influence over any voter in any way.

CATZAVENCO If you will allow me - excuse me, but it seems to me, on the contrary, that in a constitutional state, especially a young one like ours, the administration should....

ZOE It seems so to me too.

THE CITIZEN Well, well, the honourable Mr Catzavenco! I didn't see you there. You certainly pulled a fast one on me, huh? 'Have a glass of wine on me, have a beer'. There's no such thing as a free round, huh? You had the letter in your sights. You were after it, right? You certainly had me there – Bravo, Mr Catzavenco!

CATZAVENCO Oh!

ZOE Stefan, show him out, he's unbearable.

TIPATESCU Let's go, citizen, leave us in peace while I'm still asking politely. What do you want of me anyway?

THE CITIZEN Haven't I told you? It starts tomorrow.. so who do I vote for?

ZOE For Mr Catzavenco.

THE CITIZEN For who? Don't try to confuse me, my head's spinning.

TIPATESCU *More and more angry, taking the Citizen by the arm and shaking him*. Because you're depraved, citizen..

THE CITIZEN Don't push me around.. I'm dizzy..

TIPATESCU Because you let yourself be robbed of the letter..

THE CITIZEN Don't you worry about the letter – maybe I'll find another... I'm finding them all the time...

TIPATESCU Let me speak. Because you are...

THE CITIZEN A voter.

TIPATESCU No, a depraved, drunk sinner!

ZOE Stefan!

TIPATESCU Yes, a drunk – even now you're rat-arsed again.

THE CITIZEN That's not true!

TIPATESCU Wretch, you stink all over!

THE CITIZEN That's my natural odour..

TIPATESCU You stink of rum.

THE CITIZEN What do you expect? You want me to stink of petrol?

TIPATESCU Well, for all these reasons, you should cast your vote for the honourable Mr Catzavenco. Such a voter could not find a more suitable MP than Mr Catzavenco.

ZOE Stefan!

CATZAVENCO Always so amiable! He doesn't miss an opportunity.

TIPATESCU Yes, it's for Mr Catzavenco that we expend our efforts, it's him we support, it's him that you must elect. And don't imagine for one moment that he manipulated us into this view. Oh no, if we support him it's simply because, out of all our citizens, he's the most honest.....

ZOE Be calm, Stefan.

TIPATESCU I am. *Platerescu, Cheddarescu and Zaharia enter and listen.* Because this gentleman is not, unlike so many others, a rogue, because he is not, unlike so many others, a scoundrel.... Because, I repeat, electors as reasonable as you, bearing in mind the acuity of your political insight, cannot dream of a fitter representative than Mr Catzavenco – the honourable Mr Catzavenco.

CATZAVENCO How nasty he can be.

CHEDDARESCU Ah!

PLATERESCU There you have it, betrayal. I told you, dear and venerable Chairman.

ZAHARIA Have a little patience!

ZOE My dear! *Rushes to Zaharia and draws him aside to whisper to him.*

TIPATESCU Leave me alone, all of you.

PLATERESCU We'll leave you, Sir, but we're going to Bucharest.

CHEDDARESCU And we will report everything..

TIPATESCU Go to hell!

PLATERESCU ...to the newspapers!

CHEDDARESCU To the Central Electoral Commission!

PLATERESCU To the Government!

THE CITIZEN I'm dizzy.. dizzy..

ZAHARIA So, Stefan, what's going on?

TIPATESCU I'm not the one you should ask, my dear Marius.

ZOE Don't say anything, my dear, it must be!

ZAHARIA Why?

ZOE If you love me, if you care about me, be quiet now and I'll explain later.

CATZAVENCO *To Cheddarescu and Platerescu.* If you will allow me, Sirs, you cannot command more confidence in high places than our honourable Mr Tipatescu, the Prefect with the most honesty...

ZAHARIA Yes!

CATZAVENCO The most integrity…

THE CITIZEN Yes!!

CATZAVENCO The most fidelity…

ZOE Naturally!

CATZAVENCO Allow me to say that all your convulsions, all your objections are inspired by personal issues, and when people like you turn up…

THE CITIZEN. Ta-ta-ta-ra!!

PLATERESCU Insults, now.

CHEDDARESCU Bravo!

CATZAVENCO It's all a problem of local gossip, gentlemen, neighbourhood disputes about hedges.

ZOE Evidently!

CATZAVENCO The electors will judge!

ZAHARIA Certainly the electors will judge.

THE CITIZEN Yes we, we will judge!

*Enter Pristanda in a rush.*

PRISTANDA Mr Tipatescu: a telegram marked 'immediate'.

ZOE A telegram!

TIPATESCU *Takes the telegram and reads.* 'Whatever it costs, you must elect to Parliament Mr Alexander De Piffle Ionescu. We hold you fully accountable. It's an ultimate issue of trust'.

PLATERESCU and CHEDDARESCU Ah!

ZOE It's not possible, we will fight the whole world, we will fight the Government!

ZAHARIA Have a little patience!

ZOE Yes, my friend, we will fight the Government!

CATZAVENCO Yes, we will fight the Government!

THE CITIZEN *Following the general movement*. Yes, we will fight…. *Hiccuping and changing his tone*. That's to say, no, me I won't fight the Government!

ACT III

Scene 1

*The grand chamber in the Town Hall. Many people. Zaharia as Chairman at the table. Round the table, Cheddarescu and others. In the first row of chairs Catzavenco, with his group which includes Popescu. At the podium, Platerescu. There is a lot of noise.*

PLATERESCU Allow me! Please!

ZAHARIA*Ringing his chairman's bell.* Gentlemen, honourable citizens! A little bit of silence! These are important questions, searingly topical, have a little patience! Sir, you have the floor. You may proceed.

PLATERESCU After having considered this problem from the historiographical point of view, and from the juridical point of view, I will wind up as succinctly as possible…

POPESCU Is that a promise? If only he knew how to keep it! *Laughter from Catzavenco's group.*

PLATERESCU I beg you, please don't interrupt me. Allow me..

ZAHARIA Gentlemen, don't interrupt him.

PLATERESCU So, after having considered this problem from the historiographical point of view, and from the juridical point of view, I will wind up - as I have already indicated – as succinctly as possible. *He takes a drink of water, draws breath and continues slowly, as if telling a story*. In 1821 precisely…. Protests from Catzavenco's group.

POPESCU If we're going back to 1821 precisely, we're done for…

PLATERESCU Allow me…. In 1821…

CATZAVENCO's GROUP 1821 precisely…

PLATERESCU Allow me…

ZAHARIA *Ringing his bell*. Gentlemen, honourable citizens, don't interrupt. Have just a little…

CATZAVENCO …patience! What patience? How can you expect us to have patience, Mr Chairman? It's late, time is passing. Other speakers have registered their wish to take the floor.

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Yes, yes!

CATZAVENCO The honourable orator has promised to wind up as rapidly as possible: but how can he keep his word if he picks up his historical threads in 1821? It's unthinkable!

CATZAVENCO's GROUP He's right!

PLATERESCU Allow me…

ZAHARIA Dear Sir, I think it would be better to jump to 48.

CATZAVENCO To 64, at least!

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Yes, yes, 64!

ZAHARIA *Rising as if to consult the assembly.* You mean, to the Referendum?

CATZAVENCO's GROUP To the Referendum, yes!

PLATERESCU *Turning towards Zaharia.* If you will allow me, Mr Chairman, you have given me the floor, and it seems to me that a presiding Chairman, once he has given a speaker the floor…

ZAHARIA *Turning Platerescu's shoulders back towards the assembly*. If you would be so kind, dear Sir, do me a favour and move on to the Referendum, it's the will of the assembly.

PLATERESCU But, Mr Chairman…

ZAHARIA Let's move on to the Referendum.

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Yes, to the Referendum, the Referendum.

PLATERESCU Where was I then? In 1864, the time came for the ordinary decent hard-working people up and down the country to give their views in a Referendum. But first, we need to understand exactly what is the place of a Referendum - if indeed there is any place - in a representational democracy. Do we risk elevating opinion above knowledge? How do we reduce a complex issue to a simple binary question? How are the legal and political consequences of their decision to be presented to the voters? Will the result bind the hands of Parliament and what about the future generations? How do we decide…….

POPESCU We know what a Referendum is. You think we're ignorant? We don't need any explanations!

CATZAVENCO's GROUP No explanations! No explanations!

PLATERESCU Allow me… Mr Chairman!

ZAHARIA *Ringing his bell.* Dear and honourable Gentlemen, I beg you, don't interrupt the speaker. A little bit of silence. These are important questions, searingly topical, have a little patience! ……Sir, you have the floor. Please proceed.

PLATERESCU When we speak of 64, we have to talk about the Referendum. Everybody, or at least each one of us here present today, knows what 64 means - the Referendum…

CATZAVENCO We're not here to discuss the Referendum.

PLATERESCU Allow me.... I can demonstrate to you, with historical data to back me up, that other peoples have had their own Referendums, with results that even their most fervent proponents would have to admit have been mixed, at best, and.....

CATZAVENCO Allow me, we are not here to discuss the Referendum. *Supporting noises from the audience.*

PLATERESCU Allow me... Mr Chairman!

ZAHARIA *Ringing his bell.* Gentlemen, honourable fellow-citizens, a little bit of silence. These are important questions, searingly topical.....

CATZAVENCO How so, Mr Chairman? Since when does 64 represent a searingly topical question? If I am not mistaken, we are now in the year of grace 1883 – what has 64 to do with 83? Recall the orator to the agenda.

ZAHARIA Dear Sir, please leave the Referendum aside. Do me a favour and return to the agenda.

PLATERESCU Mr Chairman, you have kindly given me the floor, and I think it's necessary...

CATZAVENCO No it's not!

CATZAVENCO's GROUP No! It's not necessary!

ZAHARIA If you would be so kind, as a favour to me, the assembly wishes it.....

CATZAVENCO's GROUP The agenda, the agenda!

PLATERESCU *Exhausted, he drinks water and resigns himself*. So we thus come to the question of the protocol.

CATZAVENCO's GROUP At last! That's it!

ZAHARIA Good! Now, at least, have a little bit of patience. Be succinct, Sir, if you would be so kind, it's the wish of the assembly, be succinct.

PLATERESCU *Sweating, mopping his brow*. I beg you, allow me... You know my opinion on the protocol?

CATZAVENCO's GROUP No! We're listening... tell us!

CATZAVENCO Let's hear the valuable opinion of Mr Platerescu.

PLATERESCU My opinion is as follows: we're talking about negotiating a protocol, right?

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Yes, yes!

PLATERESCU *Throughout he speaks confusedly, losing his thread, drinking water nervously and mopping his brow from time to time. The audience makes more and more noise - cheers from the side of Cheddarescu, jeers from Catzavenco's group.* Well, this is what I say, and what those should say who, along with me, do not wish to fall into any extremity in discussing a grave political issue on which there hang the future, the present and the past of our country.... If we are called upon to sacrifice our aspirations for the sake of consensus, then we need to ask the question why - yes, why? Europe fixes its gaze upon us, and what is striking about our society, despite all the demonstrations... and civil unrest... is that, in the final end, on solemn occasions in the past, discretion has been shown by the ordinary hard-working people, up and down the country. Romania by showing its leadership might enable Europe to draw together and recognize the moment on which there hangs..... just like – allow me! – as in – allow me! – in 21 – allow me! – in 48, in 64, in 74 equally, the same as in 84, 94, and so on, as far as concerns us.. And not only us, but even to show an example to our sister nations of the Latin race up and down the world! Allow me! I've finished! Just two words more. *Silence at last*. So here, consequently, is my view. There are two options: we must choose one. Either we negotiate a new protocol, I can accept that - but then we should not change anything. Or else we don't negotiate a new protocol, I can accept that – but then we should change just a few things here and there, but only as regards the essential points. There is no solution to this dilemma! I have spoken!

*Applause, jeers, whistles. Platerescu leaves the podium shattered, goes to the back. Cheddarescu and his group shake his hand. Catzavenco speaks quietly with his group.*

*Enter Pristanda mysteriously, plucking Zaharia's sleeve to stop him ringing his bell.*

ZAHARIA What's going on?

PRISTANDA Mr Zaharia! Mr Tipatescu and Madam Zoe!

ZAHARIA Well, what's up? Speak.

PRISTANDA They're next door, in the office, they came in the back way, they're waiting for you, they want to see you inmediately!

ZAHARIA I cannot abandon my seat as chairman. They'll have to have a little patience.

PRISTANDA They need to see you right away. Rupture the session!

ZAHARIA *Rings his bell.* Gentlemen, honourable assembly. To allow us all time to reflect on the important intervention of our honourable fellow citizen, and distinguished lawyer, Mr Pladerescu, I think it would be a good idea to suspend the session for 5 minutes.

ALL Yes! Yes! 5 minutes!

*Exit Zaharia and Pristanda*

Scene 2

CATZAVENCO *To his group.* How could we consider sending such a specimen to Parliament? I admit he has his ideas and opinions, and I respect all ideas - as long as they are sincere, and he is sincere, without contradiction - just as I respect all opinions. But when he comes and inflicts on us his worn-out ideas and moth-eaten theories, when he comes and tries to scare us with his Europe, with his civil unrest, and his economics - that I can't accept. Let him permit me to say to him: opinions of that nature, I don't respect.

POPESCU But you haven't understood his argument. He maintained that in conformity with history – and that's why he fears convulsions – we should not set a bad example to our sister nations of the Latin race. You didn't understand him – but he said that himself, our sister nations of the Latin race.

CATZAVENCO You teachers, you're fine people, but you have one grave fault: as soon as someone mentions history, he's right - end of story. But if it's a question of history, what does that teach us, first of all and in the beginning?

POPESCU That Romania, since the time of the Emperor Trajan…

CATZAVENCO It's not that.

POPESCU In other words, that our common ancestor…

CATZAVENCO What ancestor? And how is he ours? Don't you see that you don't understand anything? What history teaches us, first of all and in the beginning, is that a people which does not advance stays in the same place. And even goes backwards, because the law of forward motion is immutable: the swifter the motion, the further one goes.

*His group agrees, Cheddarescu's group shrug their shoulders.*

POPESCU That's obvious.

PLATERESCU Yes, you want progress, progress without conservation… when we see that in Europe……

CATZAVENCO I don't want to know anything, Sir, about your Europe. Romania, my Romania alone matters to me. Progress, Sir, progress! It's in vain that you try to deceive the public by bringing us your scare tactics, your anti-patriotic stories, your Europe and your…. experts.

PLATERESCU Allow me – it seems to me that it's someone else who is deceiving the public.

CATZAVENCO I don't wish to hear about it!

CHEDDARESCU Of course you don't. It wouldn't suit you.

CATZAVENCO Let Europe mind its own business! Have we ever taken the slightest interest in what goes on there? No. So Europe has no right to interfere with us. You who are a lawyer, my colleague…

PLATERESCU Lawyer, yes, your colleague, no!

CATZAVENCO You are as familiar as I am with the juridical principle: every man for himself, each to his own, *oneste bibere…*

PLATERESCU If it comes to honesty, there is no comparison..

CATZAVENCO Why have you been persecuting me all this time, Sir? What have you against myself? We stand before the electors, Sir, all hatred should be excluded. We compete: you're going to put forward your candidature, I forewarn you that I shall put forward my own... the electoral combat, that's the lifeblood of a community. Why do you rebel against the truth and the light? Against what's right? *Oneste bibere,* sir.

PLATERESCU Spare me your speeches. Utter twaddle. You, honest? In one hand the *Carpathian Roar*, in the other your accomplices, here regular opposition, and there the brown envelope in the pocket. The whole town is talking about it, Sir!

*The two groups separate, ready to fight.*

CHEDDARESCU Platerescu!

PLATERESCU Let me be, my friend. Once and for all I'd like to make this gentleman face the facts. You think that we don't know, that we don't see, that we're blind? You are the prefect's candidate…

CATZAVENCO I'm the candidate of the young, intelligent and independent group. Our honourable and venerable Chairman - where is our venerable Chairman? I don't see him – will proclaim this evening, or so I believe, the name of the candidate supported by your Committee, your Committee, I emphasise. If I have the honour to be accepted by your Committee, because it is yours isn't it?....

PLATERESCU *Furious*. It's no longer our Committee, it's yours.

CHEDDARESCU Platerescu! Be reasonable.

CATZAVENCO That's to say, if you will permit me, that you are no longer on the Committee?

PLATERESCU Yes, I'm not part of it any more, me who has always supported the party: whilst you, who have always insulted the party, you're on it!

CATZAVENCO Allow me…

PLATERESCU I don't allow you. You come here with your pedants, your encyclopedias, your newspapers, your illusionists, your conmen to defraud the public – your conmen, exactly!

POPESCU Withdraw that word, sir!

PLATERESCU With 'the young, intelligent, independent' - and fraudulent group!

CATZAVENCO's GROUP *Throwing themselves violently on Cheddarescu's group* Ah! Ah!

PLATERESCU You're going to hear from me, you bunch of charlatans!

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Outside! outside!

*Uproar. Exit everyone.*

Scene 3

*Enter Zaharia, Zoe and Tipatescu*

ZAHARIA No, it's impossible.

ZOE My dear.,,,,

TIPATESCU My dear friend….

ZOE If you have ever loved me…

TIPATESCU If you are my friend….

ZAHARIA Have a little patience! How can we support the candidature of a forger?

TIPATESCU He is a forger, my friend, that's clear, but by the time that people realise, by the time he is brought before the court…..

ZOE Think of that, my dear, him making us look ridiculous in court.

ZAHARIA No, no! If there had been just one forgery, the letter to Zoe, I would understand. For the sake of politics, when the interest of the country so demands, he tried to force your hand, as any true Romanian would have done, because he knows how much you care about the honour of my little Zoe, in your capacity as friend, and so he made this forgery….

TIPATESCU Naturally!

ZOE Naturally – that's politics.

ZAHARIA Have a little patience. But what about this one? *He taps his jacket pocket.* The gentleman plays the Machiavelli! Well, I'll show him some Machiavelli! The Holy Virgin is my witness, I can swear on the head of my little Zoe, here present, she can say…

ZOE My dear..

ZAHARIA …I never played the diplomat in all my life, but if I have to…. well! I'll show him how it's done.

TIPATESCU I don't understand.

ZOE Me neither.

ZAHARIA Have a little patience. See that, is that still for politics? *Takes a dossier out of his pocket.* You see these invoices, with false endorsements, thanks to which the honourable gentleman has pocketed 5000 lei from the Walnut Producers' Association? Is that still in the interests of the country?

TIPATESCU We're saved!

ZOE Saved?

ZAHARIA You see, I told you that you should have a little bit of patience, that I'd catch him out…

TIPATESCU My dear Marius, our candidate is Mr Alexander de Piffle Ionescu.

ZAHARIA I prefer that.

ZOE I'm scared.

TIPATESCU We've nothing more to worry about.

ZAHARIA Write me the name of this candidate on a piece of paper, so I don't forget it.

TIPATESCU There you are.

ZAHARIA I'm going to re-open the session.

TIPATESCU Announce the candidature right away, close the session and come and join us in the Prefecture. We'll be expecting you.

ZAHARIA I gave you the Catzavenco dossier. Don't lose it!

TIPATESCU Don't you worry about that, dear friend. I'm not one of those people who lose important documents. *He kisses Zoe secretly.*

ZOE Stefan!

TIPATESCU And now for a bit of fun with Mr Catzavenco!

*Exit Zoe and Tipatescu*

Scene 4

*The audience returns and takes up places as before. A lot of noise from them and bell-ringing by Zaharia.*

ZAHARIA The hour is late. Let's move on, gentlemen, we have issues of burning topicality….

CATZAVENCO Mr Chairman, I beg you, I also have requested to speak.

ZAHARIA You have the floor, sir, you have the floor. You may take the podium.

*Full of his own importance, Catzavenco pushes aside the crowd and ascends the podium. He puts down his white hat, takes a drink of water. He becomes increasingly emotional. The audience is silent at first as he starts with a trembling voice.*

CATZAVENCO Gentlemen, fellow-citizens, friends, brothers! Pardon me if I appear troubled, if emotion seizes hold of my whole being as I ascend this podium in my turn to tell you that like any good Romanian, like any son of the hard-working people, in these solemn moments, I think of my

country, of my homeland, of Romania…. *he is tearful, his group applauds*….of its happiness, of its progress, of its future!

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Bravo!

CATZAVENCO *Wiping his tears and continuing in a bright tone.* My brothers, they have made a reproach against me…….. and I am proud of it. I accept it. It's an honour for me to say that I fully deserve it. They have reproached me for being an ultra-progressive, a free-marketeer, for wanting progress at any cost. Yes, yes, yes, three times yes! Yes. I want progress, and nothing but progress. Progress in politics….!

POPESCU Bravo!

CATZAVENCO .....Society!

POPESCU Bravo!

CATZAVENCO ….Economics!

POPESCU Bravo!

CATZAVENCO .....Administration!

POPESCU Bravo!

CATZAVENCO And… and…

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!

ZAHARIA*Ringing his bell.* I must ask you not to interrupt the speaker.

CATZAVENCO I have no fear of interruptions, venerable Chairman. You may interrupt me, gentlemen, I have the courage of my opinions….. And… and.. Finance. Yes, we are ultra-progressives, yes we are free-marketeers. Under the influence of these ideas we have founded here, in our own dear town, the Romanian Economic Dawn, an encyclopediac-co-operative society - independent from the one in Bucharest, because we are in favour of devolution. I don't accept the domination of Bucharest, of the metropolitan elite, the money-grabbing capitalists: we don't need them because in our own province we too can do exactly what they do in theirs.

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Bravo!

CATZAVENCO Our Society has the aim of encouraging Romanian industry because - pardon me for mentioning it - but from the strictly economic point of view, it's not going particularly well…

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Bravo!

CATZAVENCO Romanian industry is admirable, one can even say that it's sublime, but it's completely absent. So what is it that we acclaim, we and our Society? We acclaim the labour, the work that nobody is doing in our country!

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Bravo! *Frenetic applause.*

ZAHARIA *Bell*. Gentlemen. I….

CATZAVENCO Suffer the voters to interrupt me, Mr Chairman, I welcome interruptions. One of our great Romanian values is tolerance. But in the city of Constanta, for example - permit me this digression, it's sad but true, unfortunately – there is not one Romanian businessman, not a single one.

CATZAVENCO's GROUP *Touched*. Ah!

CATZAVENCO And only the foreigners go bankrupt! Can you explain this phenomenon, this mystery if I may so term it?

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Bravo!

CATZAVENCO Well! What does our Society say? What do we say, for our part? This is what we say: this state of affairs is intolerable! The English have their bankruptcies, the French have their bankruptcies, even the Austrians sometimes go bankrupt, in fact every self-respecting nation has its bankruptcies. Shall we alone not have our own bankruptcies? I repeat, this state of affairs is unacceptable! It can't go on any longer!

*Wild applause. CATZAVENCO takes some water and casts a terrible look at the audience.*

*Enter Pristanda and The Citizen*

ZAHARIA A little silence, please.

CATZAVENCO My brothers, this is what is laid down in the statutes of our Society, in the very first article: 'There is founded, in our town, an encyclopediac-co-operative society, the Romanian Economic Dawn. The aim of the Society is as follows: Romania must flourish and all Romanians must be prosperous!'

THE CITIZEN *who has advanced, staggering to a chair near the podium, now gets up and lifts a hand.* Me too! I'm up for that! *He falls back into the chair.*

CATZAVENCO Mr Chairman, I must demand not to be interrupted.

ZAHARIA But you said, sir, that you had no fear of….

CATZAVENCO Yes, but…..

ZAHARIA Finally. Please don't interrupt.

CATZAVENCO As I was saying: Romania must flourish and all Romanians must be prosperous!

THE CITIZEN Me too! Count me in!

ZAHARIA *Getting up and leaning over the table.* What? Who are you, sir?

THE CITIZEN Mr Catzavenco knows me. Cyclopean….

CATZAVENCO What?

THE CITIZEN Romania! The dawn! *Laughter from the crowd.*

ZAHARIA *Bell.* A little silence, gentlemen. What?

THE CITIZEN Cyclopean, contumacious, eco-… ecumenical! Society.. whatever.

POPESCU He's tipsy as a newt!

THE CITIZEN I'm a member!

ZAHARIA Gentlemen, gentlemen. Please show the honourable citizen the door.

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Out! He's sozzled, completely pissed. Out!

*They push him towards the door. Catzavenco comes down to speak to his group.*

THE CITIZEN Don't push, my head's spinning…

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Out!

THE CITIZEN I'm a nember!

*Exit The Citizen*

PRISTANDA *Who has approached Zaharia during the confusion.* Mr Zaharia, sir, we need to move quickly. We have to settle Mr Catzavenco's hash – orders from Mr Tipatescu. I'm outside, when I cough 3 times, proclaim the candidate and go out through the little door. Leave the rest to me.

ZAHARIA Right.

PRISTANDA When I cough 3 times, not before - my boys aren't ready yet.

*Exit Pristanda, speaking to Platerescu and Cheddarescu on the way.*

Scene 5

ZAHARIA *Bell. To Catzavenco.* Please return to the podium, sir.

CATZAVENCO My brothers!

PLATERESCU *Bringing back The Citizen.* They put you out? Is it possible, gentlemen, that you have allowed an honourable citizen, an elector, to be expelled from the assembly?

CHEDDARESCU It's because Mr Cat….

CATZAVENCO Sir! Mr Chairman!

ZAHARIA A little patience. *Pristanda coughs 3 times.* The hour being advanced.....

CATZAVENCO Allow me..

ZAHARIA Given that some of the electors have begun to leave, it would be good I think, since the election will take place tomorrow, to ask the honourable speaker to interrupt his speech, just for a moment – have a little patience – in order that the name of the candidate proposed by our Committee may be proclaimed.

CATZAVENCO I accept with pleasure, Mr Chairman. *He goes to re-join his group*. And the name of the candidate?

ALL Yes, the name of the candidate?

ZAHARIA *Looking for his piece of paper.* The candidate supported by our Committee is…

POPESCU Mr Nicolae Cat.....

ZAHARIA A little patience.... Reading the paper. Mr....

CATZAVENCO Mr....

ZAHARIA Mr.... Alexander de Piffle....

CATZAVENKO Piffle!?

ZAHARIA A little patience, it's not simple Piffle, but de Piffle, that's the aristocratic version. But that's not the last name..... The last name is..... Ionescu.

CATZAVENCO Betrayal!

ZAHARIA Allow me. *Bell*. Who has spoken of betrayal?

CATZAVENCO Me!

PRISTANDA, CHEDDARESCU, PLATERESCU etc Out! Out with the nihilist!

ZAHARIA A little patience. And who is the traitor, honourable gentleman?

CATZAVENCO He who falsifies the name of the candidate, after it has been established, he who forgets, who betrays the interests and honour of his family. With a dramatic gesture. You!

ZAHARIA So! *He throws down his bell.* Have a little patience, sir, you're making me blow my gasket. Forger, me? Me, an honourable citizen, a venerable chairman, to be called a traitor in a public meeting, and by whom? By a patent forger!

CATZAVENCO Forger?

PRISTANDA, CHEDDARESCU, PLATERESCU etc Out with the forger!

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Out with the traitor!

CATZAVENCO *Rushing to the podium.* My brothers, sirs, a moment, honourable citizens! I had hoped to maintain silence about a shameful affair that has dishonoured our town for too long. I wanted to spare public opinion, avoid a scandal. But today I have been so cruelly struck in my dignity that I am constrained to break my silence. This honourable citizen, this venerable Chairman.....

ZAHARIA So, me....

CATZAVENCO ...this man is so naïve that he takes for a forgery a handwritten document.

ZOE Stefan!

TIPATESCU Pristanda!

PRISTANDA *Entering with his policemen.* Here! OK, boys, lets go!

*They, along with Platerescu and all his group rush to the podium to grab Catzavenco. Whistles, thumping feet. Just before Catzavenco is swept away we hear...*

CATZAVENCO A letter from the Prefect to....

CATZAVENCO's GROUP Get them!

ALL Out, out!

*A general brawl as Catzavenco's group fight back.*

ACT IV

Scene 1

Zaharia's garden.

ZOE Where is Catzavenco? Where can he be?

TIPATESCU How would I know - he's run away, he's dead, he's crawled back underground. Do you imagine I don't have enough to think about? For two days our men have been electing Ionescu, who's going to arrive any moment. I have orders to receive him in triumph.

ZOE And so?

TIPATESCU So that's two days since I crushed Catzavenco and he has not shown himself. He has the letter, why doesn't he publish it? Do you believe that a scoundrel like him would hesitate to do so if he could? So here is the only explanation: he can't publish.

ZOE You have no heart. Is that any way to look at things? Think what my life has been like for these two days! What frightful stress, what torture! Every person I meet, every face I see, each movement are so many occasions to knock me off balance. One day more of this ghastly torment and I won't be able to go on. *Puts her head in her hands and cries.*

TIPATESCU Zoe, Zoe, don't be a child.

ZOE You don't have any feelings. Soon the election will end. Ionescu will be your elected Member. Well, I'm sure - absolutely positive do you hear - that at that very moment the villain who has hidden himself away and now watches us from the shadows will distribute his scurrilous paper, with the letter, to avenge himself.

TIPATESCU That's impossible, if he does that, he's done for. Because we have documentary evidence of his frauds.

ZOE What do I care? How will that console me when meantime he'll have done for me? I didn't ask you to avenge me, Stefan, but to save me. When the riot erupted at the meeting, I foresaw that we would end up like this. You must understand: he doesn't know that you have those documents. He doesn't know that he only has to come here and accept an exchange of papers to save himself and me too. There's the problem – he doesn't know. You wanted to play it subtle with Catzavenco, but you have deluded yourself. You've played with my honour as the stake and you've lost. What is to be done?

TIPATESCU Hush, someone's coming. Wipe your eyes.

Scene 2

*Enter Zaharia and Ionescu.*

ZAHARIA I beg you, dear sir, please come in.

TIPATESCU Who's that then?

ZOE A stranger?

ZAHARIA Allow me, dear Zoe, to present to you Mr Ionescu.

ZOE and TIPATESCU Ionescu?

ZAHARIA Our candidate... but he's already no longer a candidate. Our Member, I should say.

IONESCU I'm honoured, dear lady. And this gentleman – he's Madam's husband I presume?

ZAHARIA No, I'm Madam's husband, Madam is my wife, as I have had the honour to present her to you.

IONESCU And you?

ZAHARIA Me? Her husband! Me? Marius Zaharia, Chairman of the Permanent Committee, of the Electoral Committee, of the Committee for the Erection…… – have a little patience – *giving him a card* – there you have all the other committees.

IONESCU Thanks. And the gentleman?

ZAHARIA Mr Tipatescu, our Prefect, my friend and the friend of my family.

IONESCU *To Tipatescu.* Delighted, Mr Chairman.

TIPATESCU I'm equally delighted, sir. To what occasion do we owe the pleasure of seeing you?

IONESCU To the occasion of the election, my dear chap: you know, the opposition have fought me here and there, and then here again – you know, like everywhere. I couldn't get a seat – me, from a family that's always been elected to Parliament ever since 45. Even my kid brother's got a seat! But I couldn't get a seat anywhere… that's why I came here, for the election.

ZOE *Sarcastically*. You shouldn't have put yourself to such trouble.

IONESCU As for trouble, you're right, I had plenty of that. But in the end, I felt I had to show my face. At least that. And anyway I wanted to promote my book.

ZAHARIA Of course, yes, it was necessary, necessary.

IONESCU But what a farrago it turned out to be! Imagine, all that way in a barouche – and the roads… well, if we rely on our roads for freedom of movement, then the whole concept is just….. bollocks. The barouche shook, and rattled, and clattered, and juddered. Inside I was jumping about, even turning somersaults. And what a racket! The carriage bells! *Makes a gesture to imitate the bells.* My ears are still ringing! Deafened, shaken, jolted, exhausted. You can't imagine, my little lady. *To Zaharia.* You can't imagine, dear Prefect. *To Tipatescu* You can't imagine, Mr Chairman, my friend.

TIPATESCU Naturally.

ZAHARIA That's understandable.

IONESCU Just now when I arrived I wanted to check in to the hotel. But the coachman pointed out the Prefect to me. *He indicates Zaharia.*

ZOE *Whispering to Tipatescu, who is laughing*. You can still laugh, Stefan?

ZAHARIA Yes, I was passing by to check on the polling. It's going like clockwork, there's nothing to do, but I had to take a look. In my capacity as head of the party, you know, I have to show my face.

IONESCU What luck that I ran into you, old chap! Thank you. *Zaharia and Ionescu talk apart.*

ZOE Look at him! So that's the person for whom I've lost my peace of mind. Sincerely now, wasn't Catzavenco preferable to him?

TIPATESCU He's not particularly bright, I grant you, but he's worth more than that rascal, at least he's honest.

ZAHARIA I'll leave you here, sir, with Mr Tipatescu and my little Zoe. I have to make an appearance at the elections. In half an hour they will open the boxes, I need to be there. Don't worry, there's nothing to fear, the Opposition, here, does not exist. We're strong, sir, very strong. You won't have a majority…

IONESCU Don't give me that! I hope you're not going to spin me that yarn about a minimum voting threshold? That's what happened in the other places.

ZAHARIA Have a little patience. A voting threshold, here? Don't even think of it. You won't have a majority, sir, because it will be unanimous!

IONESCU Absolutely! Yes, that's obvious. It couldn't be any other way.

ZAHARIA I'll see you later, Sir. Goodbye, Stefan. Goodbye, Zoe.

*Exit Zaharia*

IONESCU So, as I was telling you, my friend, ever since 45, in my family, whenever we're not needed at the front, we're contesting elections! So you understand…. for me to remain without the smallest constituency… incredible! Yet it nearly happened.

ZOE Not to be elected, you, with your merits… that's impossible.

IONESCU Well yes, my dear, but despite my merits, it nearly happened, I assure you. The Central Committee didn't want to know, they said I wasn't sufficiently trusted. Insufficiently trusted, me! But I had a bit of luck, sir, what an extraordinary piece of luck…. One fine evening, someone – don't make me tell you who, a prominent figure yes, and a bachelor – came to my place for a party. And he forgot his overcoat. The next day I go to put it on – I thought it was mine. Then I realise it's not mine, so I search the pockets and what do I find?

TIPATESCU What?

IONESCU A letter!

TIPATESCU and ZOE A letter.

IONESCU A little love letter!

TIPATESCU and ZOE A love letter.

IONESCU A love letter that my bachelor friend had received from a colleague's wife. Don't make me tell you who he is – he's a celebrity.

TIPATESCU And then…

IONESCU It was simple, my friend, simple. Quick, a cab. Straight to the bachelor – don't make me tell you who, he's a national figure. Find me a constituency, I tell him, or I'll publish this letter in the *Patriotic Voyeur*. He tries to negotiate, to argue, to pontificate. In vain, he had no choice but to concede. And yes, my sweetheart! That's how the telegram arrived here.

ZOE Ah, sir, you have acted badly. Your behaviour, if you will allow me to say…

TIPATESCU Zoe!

IONESCU It's true, old chap, isn't it, that I have a head for politics. What? What else could I have done? If that idea hadn't come to me, I would not have been elected, and that, my friend, was unthinkable! Imagine, my family in all the Parliaments since 45, with all the parties, impartial Romanians as they are, and me to remain without a constituency.

TIPATESCU Naturally. But you didn't tell us the end of the story.. the letter…

ZOE Yes, the letter.

IONESCU What letter?

TIPATESCU The letter from the bachelor.

IONESCU What bachelor?

ZOE The celebrity … the love letter… your political weapon thanks to which you have been elected.

TIPATESCU The letter that you wanted to publish in the *Patriotic Voyeur*…or else….

IONESCU Oh yes! That letter… yes I understand.

TIPATESCU What have you done with it?

IONESCU I placed it under security. At home, but in what one can call a safe place.

ZOE You didn't return it to its owner?

IONESCU What – give it back?

TIPATESCU You will be elected. He kept his word….

ZOE You should return it to him..

IONESCU How can you suggest, my sweetie, that I should give it back? I'm not so dumb. It could still be useful. If an occasion presents itself, I'll start again..

ZOE Ah! *Aside to Tipatescu* 'He's simple, but he's an honest man'! *Aloud to Ionescu.* Mr Ionescu, I have a favour to ask you: we're inviting you to stay for luncheon, but please don't recount this story about the letter and the bachelor.

TIPATESCU It could make a disagreeable impression on the electors.

IONESCU I won't say a thing about it, my friend, not a thing. But if I forget – I usually have a good memory, but now I'm knackered by the journey, it could happen that I forget. So if I forget, give me a sign. Where will I be sitting at the table? Beside you or your charming wife?

TIPATESCU What wife?

IONESCU Madam.

ZOE *aside* What an idiot!

TIPATESCU I beg your pardon, Mr Ionescu. Madam is the wife of the Chairman of the Committee, the gentleman who brought you here. Mr Marius Zaharia, Madam Zoe Zaharia.. I am Stefan Tipatescu, Prefect of this province, I am only a friend of Madam…

IONESCU You're right, my friend, that's true. I'm muddled, sorry, it was the journey. You can't imagine, all that way in a barouche. What somersaults, what bumping. And those bloomin' carriage bells (*the gesture again)*... My ears are still ringing, it's severe case of tinnitus….

ZOE *Aside to Tipatescu*: I'll have to take him somewhere to rest a while, he's absolutely stupefied.

TIPATESCU Mr Ionescu, wouldn't you like to rest up and relax a little?

IONESCU I'd like that, my friend, but where?

ZOE Follow me, sir.

IONESCU You can't imagine, my sweetie, the barouche, its bells… My ears are still ringing….

*Exit Zoe and Ionescu.*

TIPATESCU And I got him elected! That's the man for whom I sacrificed my own peace of mind, and that of the lady I love. Where are you, Catzavenco, to contemplate your vengeance? Where are you, to accept my apologies for having preferred this man to you? Honesty makes the man.. this admirable, sublime Ionescu! What a world… what a world….

ZOE *Rushing back.* Did you hear that, Stefan? Your honest Mr Ionescu, who succeeded, who triumphed, keeps the letter. What will the honest Catzavenco do? He didn't succeed, he gnaws his fist, he rages and watches me squatting in his hiding hole. What is he doing? Where he has he gone to coil himself up, this serpent? From where will he spring out to sting us?

TIPATESCU Zoe, Zoe, man up, be strong, man up…

ZOE *In tears*. I can't take any more, Ionescu's words have robbed me of my strength and broken my heart! I'm going mad with fear! She buries her face in her hands.

*Enter Pristanda*

PRISTANDA Madam Zoe, Madam Zoe!

TIPATESCU Pristanda!

ZOE What's happened? Speak!

PRISTANDA Madam Zoe, I wanted….

ZOE Tell me, don't torture me any more! What's happened? He's published it? Show it me! Show it me, I say!

TIPATESCU Zoe, you're crazy.

PRISTANDA *Aside*: Absolutely crazy.

ZOE Yes I'm crazy, I owe that to you… and I thank you for it.

PRISTANDA No, Madam Zoe, there's nothing, nothing has been publicated. The *Roar* has not even appeared today. After Catzavenco ran off, the pendants began to argue among themselves, they even fell to blows, and they beat up the priest Popich…. no question of any paper, now. Their Impendant Party has burst into pieces, little factments. *Whispering to Zoe as he passes her.* I want to tell you something in secret, right away.

TIPATESCU I told you how it would be. And Catzavenco?

PRISTANDA I haven't found him. Crawled back to his cave. *Slapping himself on the forehead as if he has just remembered.* Ah! I forgot for a moment but now I've suddenly remembered.... I must beg your pardon, Mr Prefect, sir... a message: the minister – no, all 7 ministers - are calling you urgently to the telegraph. That's why I came here looking for you.

TIPATESCU To the telegraph! What can they want of me now?

PRISTANDA I don't know, but the telegraph hasn't stopped whirring for an hour, sir, you'd better go there with post haste....

TIPATESCU To hell with bloody politics. Zoe, Zoe, take heart, I'm going....

ZOE Off you go then.

TIPATESCU I'll be back right away. Zoe, be sensible. We're not lost, don't worry. Goodbye.

ZOE Goodbye. Oh! How can I love this man?

*Exit Tipatescu.*

Scene 3

PRISTANDA Madam Zoe!

ZOE Ah, you made me jump. What do you want from me? Go away and leave me alone.

PRISTANDA Sorry, Madam Zoe... don't be cross. There's someone who wants to talk to you, but only to you, that's why I sent Mr Tipatescu off to the telegraph. I told him a lie so that you would be alone. I know he'll make me pay for that, and how, for sending him on a fool's errand.... He'll beat me and chastate me, but let him, I've been chastated by him before now. He's my posterior, right? He's my boss who puts my bread on the table. Yet I lied to him for your benefit, Madam Zoe... so you'll receive him, right?

ZOE *Busy with her own thoughts, she's not been listening.* Receive who?

PRISTANDA Who? Who? Mr Catzavenco.

ZOE Catzavenco! He's here? Where is he? Show him in right away! Quick!

PRISTANDA Right! This way, sir, this way.

*Enter Catzavenco and exit Pristanda*

ZOE Mr Catzavenco, you sought to ruin me and you've ruined yourself too. Why did you run off, for God's sake? Tipatescu has a dossier which shows you falsified the invoices to take money from the Producers Association. Did you know?

CATZAVENCO I know, Madam, I know, but what is to be done?

ZOE But you're crazy! You haven't all your wits about you. You ask me what is to be done? You save me and I'll save you: I'll give you the dossier and in exchange you return the letter to me.

CATZAVENCO Madam, Madam, it's impossible..

ZOE What?

CATZAVENCO Your letter...

ZOE Well?

CATZAVENCO I don't have it any more.

ZOE Wretch! What have you done with it?

CATZAVENCO I lost it.

ZOE Ah! Why can't I kill you?

CATZAVENCO Kill me, Madam, kill me, but it's not my fault.

ZOE How did you lose it? When did you lose it? Where did you lose it?

CATZAVENCO At the meeting the other day, when the brawling broke out, someone, I don't know who, snatched my hat. The letter was sewn into it, in the lining.

ZOE So you've lost my letter and you don't know, you don't even have the least idea, into whose hands it may have fallen?

CATZAVENCO No

ZOE Then you're ruined – ruined. I may still be able to save myself, yes, I've still some chance of being saved but you – you're lost. When the Prefect had you arrested, it was me who got you out of jail. Now it's me who will send you back there. Ah, the tables are turned, Mr Catzavenco, Lady Luck deserts you, and passes over to our side... You're lost, lost! Shouting. Pristanda! Pristanda!

CATZAVENCO Madam, for the love of God.....

ZOE Don't try to escape, all forgers like you end up paying for it sooner or later! Pristanda!

*Enter THE CITIZEN with the white hat that belongs to Catzavenco*

THE CITIZEN It's not the policeman, it's me.

ZOE What do you want?

CATZAVENCO *Aside*: My hat!

THE CITIZEN It's you I'm looking for, Madam Zoe.

ZOE What do you want?

THE CITIZEN Ah! There's Mr Catzavenco! Hullo, honourable Mr Catzavenco!

ZOE What do you want? Tell me what you want.

THE CITIZEN I know what I want. But first: long live peace. Me, Madam Zoe, I've found a letter.

ZOE That you allowed the honourable Mr Catzavenco to steal...

CATZAVENCO Madam!

THE CITIZEN Forget it, that one. I've found another!

ZOE What's that to do with me?

THE CITIZEN Don't get cross, Madam Zoe, wait and see, I haven't told you everything. Before devoting myself, as one might say, to politics, that is to say before becoming a businessman and a proprietor, I worked in the post office, as Mr Zaharia knows...

ZOE Go on, get out once and for all, leave me alone. Pristanda!

THE CITIZEN From that time I've retained a habit: I bear letters to the address which is on the envelope. If there is no address I write on it with a pencil 'recipient unknown' or perhaps 'untraceable', depending on how the case presents itself. But if I find the recipient, I give it to him. For example, now. The day before yesterday, in the fight at the town hall, I found a hat.

ZOE A hat?

CATZAVENCO The wretch.

THE CITIZEN A hat, yes – this one, in fact. And today, trying to stuff my head into it – it seemed rather too small – I wanted to take out the lining, to enlarge it a little. But in the lining, what do you think I found?

ZOE A letter!

CATZAVENCO A letter.

THE CITIZEN A letter, yes, Mr Catzavenco, are you offering to buy the drinks again?

ZOE Show it me!

THE CITIZEN It’s from Mr Tipatescu: the addressee is you.

ZOE Quick, quick, give it here!

CATZAVENCO I’m really done for now.

ZOE Quick, if you really have it.

THE CITIZEN I’ve got it, I’ve not lost it, I didn't meet the honourable Mr Catzavenco on the way. *Taking the letter out of the lining and handing it to Zoe.*

CATZAVENCO Ah, the wretch.

ZOE Ah!

CATZAVENCO *Aside to The Citizen*. You’ve wasted your opportunity, you loser, you’ve thrown it into the sea. I could have helped you become someone.

THE CITIZEN I couldn't have acted otherwise, the recipient had a known domicile.

ZOE Sir, you’re an honest fellow, an admirable man - you have no equal in this town. What’s your name, tell me it..... my gratitude...

THE CITIZEN There’s no point in me telling you my name. Mr Zaharia knows me. I’m a citizen, me too.

ZOE But how can I thank you? What can I do for you?

THE CITIZEN You can tell me who to vote for. In a quarter of an hour the polling stations will close. And who should I vote for?

CATZAVENCO *Bitterly*. For Mr Ionescu.

ZOE Mr Catzavenco, you still dare to open your mouth! And you are ironical too! There’s no doubt, you’re bold.

THE CITIZEN Is it true what he says, Madam Zoe?

ZOE Yes it’s true - Mr Ionescu, that’s correct. It’s possibly the only truth Mr Catzavenco has ever uttered in his life.

THE CITIZEN I’m off to vote then. But what’s his name again, that chap?

ZOE Mr Catzavenco, would you be so kind as to fill up his voting slip for this honourable citizen. *Catzavenco does not move.* Please. *She shows him the letter. He goes to the table and fills up the slip.* Allow me? *He passes it to her and she reads:* ‘Alexander de Piffle Ionescu.’ Bravo, Mr Catzavenco, you’re a man of your word.

THE CITIZEN *Taking the slip.* I’m off now, time’s pressing.

ZOE I beg you, sir, to count on my gratitude whenever you wish to do so.

THE CITIZEN I’m in a hurry, have to get to the polling station.

*Exit The Citizen*

CATZAVENCO *Falling to his knees.* Forgive me, forgive me..

ZOE Get up! Are you a man? You should be ashamed. Get up!

CATZAVENCO Forgive me..

ZOE With dignity. You’re a wicked man, you’ve proved it. But I’m a good woman and I’m going to prove it. Now, I’m happy. Now, it doesn't matter that you meant me harm because you did not succeed. Our Lord was not on your side because you’re wicked: since I want him always on my side to help me, I will continue to be good.

CATZAVENCO Madam!

ZOE Don’t tremble. You’re saved... you have my word of honour.

CATZAVENCO I thank you, my devotion to you knows no limits....

ZOE There is one condition: after the election there will be a public celebration. You'll be in charge.

CATZAVENCO I will.

ZOE You will preside at the popular banquet in the garden of the Town Hall.

CATZAVENCO I will preside.

ZOE You will organise the public rejoicing.

CATZAVENCO I will organise.

ZOE And you will come here, with all of the citizens, to acclaim the elected Member and the Prefect in the name of the electors.

CATZAVENCO Yes.

ZOE And your newspaper will report that this was the largest crowd ever to attend an inauguration ceremony in this town – in any town, in fact.

CATZAVENCO In any town.

ZOE We have understood each other?

CATZAVENCO Yes.

ZOE Go on then, and about it zealously. This is not the last time a new Member will be selected.

CATZAVENCO Madam, you are an angel of bounty.

ZOE Thank you, you're very gallant, but on you go now…

CATZAVENCO I'm going, I'm going. You will see that I know how to do it. My obeisances...

*Exit Catzavenco*.

ZOE Can it be true? Am I dreaming? She sits down, reads the letter, kisses it. Stefan! Reads it and kisses it again. Stefan! She cries.. After a while she gets up, smiles, dries her eyes and breathes deeply. Ah, it's passed! Stefan!

*Exit Zoe*

Scene 4

*Enter Tipatescu*

TIPATESCU What's up with Pristanda? Has he gone mad? He sends me to the telegraph for nothing. He's playing tricks on me, or what? What possible sense does that make? And Zoe – where's she?

*Exit Tipatescu. Enter Zaharia and Ionescu*

ZAHARIA Ah, sir, the struggle here has been bitter. Whatever one may say, we've had our dramas..

IONESCU How's that?

ZAHARIA Infamous behaviour. Imagine, a fool, a rascal, in order to influence Tipatescu……. you know him, the Prefect..... *Ionescu follows with attention but does not seem to understand.*

IONESCU Ah yes, you're right – you're not the Prefect.

*In the distance a military band strikes up.*

ZAHARIA In order to destroy his rapport with me and my family, he fabricated a love letter, supposedly from the said Tipatescu, the Prefect, to my little Zoe and he imitated the writing of the Prefect so perfectly that we could have been taken in. A masterly forgery!

IONESCU Impossible! Anyway, in my case, it was real.

*The military band, along with a cheering crowd, gets louder and closer all the time, until the crowd comes onto the stage.*

ZAHARIA What do you mean, real?

IONESCU The letter really was from the person, the bachelor.

ZAHARIA Who do you mean, the bachelor?

IONESCU That's to say, the unmarried guy.

ZAHARIA Who?

IONESCU Don't make me tell you who – he's an important public figure. When I gave him the choice: either the constituency or publish the letter in the *Patriotic Voyeur,* you understand, that did it: the telegram came here, to you…..

ZAHARIA I don't understand! *Aside*: He's stupefied by the journey, the barouche, the bells…

IONESCU *Aside*: He's a simpleton, this Prefect, you tell him the same story twice and he still doesn't get it.

*Enter Zoe and Tipatescu, happily talking. When Zoe sees the others she changes tone.*

ZOE So Mr Prefect, the storm does not last for ever. Mr Ionescu, luncheon will be served in the garden.

IONESCU I was just talking to the Prefect and he was telling me…

TIPATESCU To the Prefect?

IONESCU To the Prefect. *He indicates Zaharia, who is talking to Zoe.*

ZOE *Quietly to Zaharia*. So, my dear, does your MP please you?

ZAHARIA He's intelligent, but a bit tricky…

IONESCU *To Tipatescu* He was telling me the tales of your election here, with the letter, with the forgery. And I was telling him that in my case, it was all true, with the bachelor…

ZOE *Rushing over to him and speaking low.* Mr Ionescu, you promised me not to breathe a word about that story..

IONESCU I made a commitment, me? When was that? In what context did I make it? What did I promise? Oh yes!... No! I don't remember…

Scene 5

*Enter everyone, bottles in hand. Citizens carry green branches and flags. Sparkling wine is served to the notables. Ionescu begins drinking, even though others are waiting for a toast to be proposed.*

IONESCU This is jolly good champagne.

TIPATESCU Prosecco, in fact.

IONESCU I've a lot of time for Prosecco, even if it is Italian. Good stuff. We'll drink their prosecco as long as they buy our – what is it again? I know there is something you are world-famous for producing in stonking great quantities around here….

ZOE Nuts. Absolutely nuts.

TIPATESCU Walnuts, especially.

ZAHARIA *Raising his glass.* I would like to propose the toast. Health and long life to our new Member, Mr. Ionescu.

IONESCU To the health of the electors, in this fantastic constituency, who have proved their patriotism by giving me… their… what do you call them… it's on the tip of my tongue.. ah, yes! ….their suffrages. Here's to you!

Well I certainly needed that drink. What a journey I had. I must say that this constituency, absolutely fantastic as it is, is not very well placed, is it, in relation to the capital.

Please allow me to introduce myself……. That's from a song, I think. My family has been installed in the Parliament since 45, and as a good impartial Romanian I'm not ashamed to be proud of our past. Of our great statesmen who established our place in the world. Like Vlad the Impaler. I've just written a book about him, and you can buy signed copies in the bookshop here. He should still be our inspiration and shining example – a true patriot, with firm measures for dealing with foreigners. I know,

I know, some miserable moaners, some doomsters and gloomsters say that he went too far. But one thing's sure - he can be a lesson to modern politicians: he knew that what our people want to hear is never mind the foreigners, we are Romanians! Why would we need anyone else in our country? Romania first! Let's make it Greater again! Even more greater! And build a big wall round it! That's what we say. As for Europe…. They need us more than we need them…so….you see… in conclusion… whatever….. anyway, long live the electors! *Applause*. He pauses for a drink.

ZAHARIA *To Catzavenco.* Well, I can't believe my eyes! Here you are as one of us, sir! Bravo! I'm delighted!

CATZAVENCO Dear Sir, venerable Chairman! In such circumstances the lesser passions must give way. The people have given their verdict.

ZAHARIA That's the way to talk! Bravo! Your health!

CATZAVENCO To the health of our venerable and impartial Chairman!

THE CITIZEN To the health of Madam Zoe! Because she's a fine woman!

CATZAVENCO *To Tipatescu*. Forgive me: let's be friends. Because we all love our country, we're all Romanians, more or less honest, but Romanians nonetheless. *Tipatescu laughs.* To the health of our dear Prefect! May he live long, for the happiness of our province!

ZAHARIA Have a little patience… please! I don't know any Prefect, I have no Prefect, me, I have only a friend. Viva Stefan Tipatescu! May he live long, for the honour of his friends! *He hugs Tipatescu, then Zoe. Tipatescu kisses Zoe's hand.*

*Ionescu is recounting his journey to Platerescu, Cheddarescu and others – he makes the gesture of the bells. Catzavenco profits from the moment to make a speech.*

CATZAVENCO My brothers, after millennial struggles, which lasted nearly 50 years, our dream has at last been realized! We have striven and we have advanced: yesterday, doom and gloom; today, optimism: yesterday, petty-fogging restrictions; today, we can take liberties: yesterday, misery; today, joy…….. there you see the fruits of progress, of democracy.

IONESCU The electors have searched deep in their hearts and have finally spoken, and I don't think we need any fancy experts to come here and tell us what they were trying to say. They have decisively rejected all the other old fashioned and out of date candidates. It's a victory for the real, ordinary, decent hard-working people up and down the province who want me to lead them forward with a long-term plan for the benefit of all of us. To Romania! Something is breaking here and it's a new dawn! Like some sleeping dragon we're going to ping off and stride boldly into the future and - thanks to the voters – we can be sure our future will be Titanic!

PRISTANDA Absolutely Titanic! Music, music!

*Fanfare, acclamations, everyone hugs each other, including Ionescu and Catzavenco. Ionescu makes his bell gesture. Zoe and Tipatescu, to one side, contemplate the scene.*

END